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'THE RISE OF RAM RAJYA'

PM inaugurates Ram Mandir built after 500 years of dispute over Babri mosque

AYODHYA, 22 JAN

The new Ram Lalla idol was consecrated at the Ayodhya temple on Monday, an event led by Prime Minister Narendra Modi who said it marked the advent of a new era.

Lakhs of people watched the pran pratishtha' ceremony on television at their homes and in neighbourhood temples, becoming part of the historic event held just months ahead of the Lok Sabha elections.

Along with the scrapping of Article 370 that gave a special status to Jammu and Kashmir and the implementation of a uniform civil code, building a grand Ram temple in Ayodhya has been on the BJP's agenda for decades.

A temple-mosque dispute had simmered over the spot where the 16th century Babri mosque stood.

Many Hindus believe that the mosque was constructed after the demolition of a temple that existed on the site of Lord Ram's birthplace. Kar sewaks demolished it on December 6, 1992.

After a long legal battle, the top court in 2019 ruled in favour of the construction of the temple. It also ordered allotment of a five-acre plot for building a mosque.

Army helicopters showered flower petals on the newly constructed Janmabhoomi temple as the pran pratishtha' ceremony took place. And celebrations broke out in parts of this Uttar Pradesh temple town with people singing and dancing.

Modi recalled there were times when some people said the country would be on fire if the Temple was built.

"I would urge those people to rethink. Ram is not fire but energy. Ram is not a dispute, but a solution. Ram is not just ours but belongs to everyone. Ram is not just the present, but eternity," he said.

Modi performed a series of rituals in the grabhagriha' the sanctum sanctorum -- with the pran pratishtha' taking place during the 84-second 'Abhijeet muhurta'. At the end, he prostrated himself before the 51-inch idol that depicts the child Ram.

Modi addressed a gathering of about 8,000, which included sadhus, people linked to the Ram Janmabhoomi movement and celebrities from fields like entertainment, sports and industry.

He also visited Kuber Tila shrine, unveiled a statue of Ramayana figure Jatayu and showered petals on workers who built the temple. The first phase of the temple built by a trust has so far cost Rs 1,100 crore. It is expected to open Tuesday to the public.

Senior BJP leaders including party Chief JP Nadda and Union Home Minister Amit Shah were not present at the consecration ceremony.

The run-up to the ceremony was marked by much sparring between the ruling BJP and the Opposition. Top opposition leaders skipped the temple inauguration, calling it an RSS-BJP event. —*PTI*

>>>More on Pages 2, 3 & 5

Prime Minister Narendra Modi offers prayers before the idol of Ram Lalla during the 'Pran Pratishtha' rituals at the Ram Mandir, in Ayodhya on Monday — ***PHOTO: X/ BBMPCOMM***

Today, our Ram has arrived. Our Ram Lalla will no longer live in a tent. Our Ram Lalla will stay in a magnificent temple

-Narendra Modi, Prime Minister

PHOTO: PTI

BJP 'anti-women', silent on Goddess Sita: Mamata

KOLKATA, 22 JAN

West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee on Monday flayed the BJP for attempting to politicise religion ahead of the Lok Sabha polls, labelling the saffron camp as "anti-women" for "omitting" Goddess Sita from their discourse about Lord Ram.While spearheading the TMC's 'Sanhati Rally', which coincided with the Ram temple consecration in Ayodhya, she underscored Bengal's pivotal role in preserving the principles of secularism and inclusiveness in the country. She began the 'all-faith harmony' march from Hazra More which concluded at Park Circus crossing."They (BJP) talk about Lord Ram, but what about Goddess Sita? She was all along with Lord Ram during his exile. They don't speak about her as they are anti-women. We are worshippers of Goddess Durga, so they should not try to lecture us about religion," she asserted. —*PTI*

Row erupts after Rahul denied entry into Assam temple

NAGAON, 22 JAN

High drama prevailed in Assam's Haiboragaon on Monday after Congress leader Rahul Gandhi was not allowed by authorities to visit the Sri Sri Sankar Dev Satra temple in Bordua near here.

Gandhi, along with other Congress leaders, was stopped at Haiboragaon and not allowed to proceed further. The former Congress chief was scheduled to pay obeisance to the local deity before starting his Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra on Monday.

Mahila Congress leaders subsequently sat on a dharna to protest against denial of permission to Gandhi to visit the temple. Authorities said Gandhi will be allowed permission to visit the temple only at 3pm. Gandhi questioned the police on why he was being stopped from visiting the temple. "Will Modi now decide who will visit a temple and when," Gandhi said. We do not want to create any problems, simply pray at the temple," Gandhi told the police authorities. Tight security arrangements, deployment of a huge police force and blockade of roads was in force around the Sri Sri Sankar Dev Satra temple.

Rahul Gandhi — ***PHOTO: PTI***

Barring the local MP and MLA, no Congress leader was allowed to travel beyond Haiboragaon, around 20 km from the temple spot.

Cong questions naming 'security personnel, ' in FIR

Congress on Monday said the purported route deviation in Jorhat town on first day of the party's Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra in Assam last week was "due to confusion". It criticised the registration of an FIR in the eastern Assam district against "security personnel and others", claiming that if any barricade was broken, it was done by party leaders. A suo motu FIR was registered at Jorhat Sadar police station on 18 January for alleged route deviation by the yatra as it moved through the main town. —*PTI*

>>>More on Page 4

INNOCENCE AND DEVOTION

Devotees during 'Aarti' at the ISKCON Temple on the occasion of the consecration ceremony of Ayodhya's Ram Mandir, in Bengaluru on Monday — ***PHOTO: MOHAMMED ASAD***

Nitish, Lalu to join Cong yatra in Bihar

PATNA, 22 JAN

Congress leader Rahul Gandhi's 'Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra' will enter Bihar on 29 January and cover four districts in three days during which top INDIA bloc leaders may join him for public meetings, the party announced here on Monday.

Addressing a press conference at the historical Sadaqat Ashram, the Bihar Pradesh Congress Committee headquarters, senior leader and MLC Prem Chandra Mishra said that Gandhi will reach Kishanganj district from Siliguri in West Bengal, and after interacting with the public and a night halts, leave for Purnea a day later.

"In Purnea, a big rally has been planned. Invites have been sent to our alliance partners like Chief Minister Nitish Kumar who has agreed to come. In the event of his getting caught up elsewhere, the JD(U) President has assured that a senior leader will be sent to represent his party," said Mishra. —*PTI*

DMK vs BJP battle over Ayodhya event goes to SC

NEW DELHI/CHENNAI, 22 JAN

BJP vs ruling DMK battle over live telecast of the Ayodhya Ram temple consecration in Tamil Nadu shrines reached the Supreme Court on Monday, with the apex court asking the authorities to act in accordance with the law and not based on any oral instructions.

In the Madras High Court, state government submitted no permission was needed for related functions in private enclosures. While the court held Bhakti towards God is only for peace and happiness and not to disturb the social equilibrium, this was cited by Chief Minister MK Stalin as the court's 'censure' of Saffron party people.

A war of words over 'ban' on live telecast and conducting other events like Bhajans and Annadhanam broke between the BJP leaders and Governor RN Ravi on the one side and Chief Minister Stalin and Hindu Religious and Charitable Endowments Department Minister PK Sekar Babu on the other side.

Governor Ravi alleged that priests and staff of a Shri Ram temple here, under the control of the state government, faced 'repression' while the entire country celebrated the 'Pran Pratishtha' of Ram Lalla in Ayodhya. The CM slammed the Governor for his 'repression' remark and the BJP as well for 'Ram temple politics.'

Both Sitharaman and Annamalai had alleged on Sunday that public screening of Ayodhya event and related programmes like Bhajan was barred by authorities in the state.

The Saffron party alleged the DMK regime is 'anti-Hindu' and people would teach a fitting lesson to the ruling party in the Lok Sabha polls. —*PTI*

Religious images being projected inside the Ram Mandir premises on Monday — ***PHOTO: PTI***

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FINAL LIST OUT

Bengaluru has 98.43 Lok Sabha voters

BENGALURU, 22 JAN

As per the revised final electoral roll for Lok Sabha polls 2024, Bengaluru has over 98.43 lakh voters including, 50.78 lakh men 47.63 lakh women and 1,784 in the others category.

Bruhat Bengaluru Mahanagara Palike (BBMP) published the revised list on Monday.

There are total voters in 98,43,577 the city of which 1,12,242 will vote for the first time On 27th October last year, BBMP released a draft list of voters, which included 97,90,499 voters. This number has since increased by over 53,000 voters this year.

Bengaluru Urban has the highest number of voters — ***PHOTO: PTI***

Bengaluru Urban has the highest number of voters with 37,19,723, followed by Bengaluru North at 22,09,318, Bengaluru South at 20,56,109 and Central at 18,05,349.

The final electoral rolls are available on the State Election Commission and BBMP websites.

Changes, including additions and deletions, can be made on the Election Commission of India website up to 10 days before the nomination process concludes. Citizens who have not applied for the Voter ID cards can apply and it will also be open 10 days before the nomination date is released. —*Salar News*

- Bengaluru Urban has the highest number of voters with 37,19,723, followed by Bengaluru North at 22,09,318, Bengaluru South at 20,56,109 and Central at 18,05,349.

Replace Assam Rifles: Manipur MLAs

IMPHAL, 22 JAN

Thirty-four legislators of the ruling alliance in Manipur, including seven Naga MLAs, have urged the Centre to revoke the Suspension of Operations (SoO) with Kuki militant groups, as well as replace the Assam Rifles with other security forces "that have the ability to act".

The legislators claimed that in several areas, the Assam Rifles was "not responsive" and remained "mute spectators" when unarmed civilians, mostly farmers, came under attack by armed men.

"SoO agreements with the militant groups and the immunity it provides to them from central forces are the main cause of the never-ending cycle of violence. Thus SoO... should be abrogated immediately. It should not extended beyond its expiry date of 29 February, 2024," the MLAs said in a statement.

"These forces (Assam Rifles) and their leadership (chain of command) need to give strict instructions and be held accountable, and replace with forces that have the ability to act by returning suppressive fires when they observe that unarmed civilians are being fired upon," it said.

MLAs have also called for "complete disarmanent of illegal arms in the possession of unauthorised persons" in the state at the earliest.

Legislators also asserted that if the Union government is "unable to take any positive action as per these demands", the MLAs will take "appropriate action in consultation with the public." —*PTI*

Assam Rifles, CAPF & police personnel in Manipur — ***PHOTO: PTI***

- Legislators also asserted that if the Union government is "unable to take any positive action as per these demands", the MLAs will take appropriate action.

CRIME BEAT

Man arrested for FB post against Ram Mandir

GADAG, 22 JAN

A man from Gadag's Gajendragad town was arrested over a Facebook post against the newly inaugurated Ram temple in Ayodhya. Tajuddin Dafedar shared an edited photo of a green flag on the Ram Mandir. The image went viral and sparked outrage among pro-Hindu workers. The pro-Hindu activist alerted the police and demanded action against the accused. The incident led to a tense situation in Gadag. After the accused's arrest, Bajrang Dal members rushed to the police station and held a protest. Police Sub-Inspector Soman Gowda confirmed that an FIR has been registered against Dafedar. — *Salar News*

Hindus, Muslim unitedly offer puja at Koppal temple

KOPPAL, 22 JAN

In a display of communal unity, leaders from both Hindu and Muslim communities gathered at Shri Ram Mandir at Bhagyanagar in the district to take part in the puja carried out during the consecration of Ram Temple in Ayodhya. The worship started with an 'Aarti' and the distribution of 'Prasad,' and visuals of the event went viral on social media *—Salar News*

Woman shouts Allahu Akbar against Ram slogans

BENGALURU, 22 JAN

Tension prevailed in Shivappa Nayaka Circle of Shivamogga on Monday after a Muslim woman responded with Allahu Akbar's against 'Jai Sri Ram' slogans during the celebration of Ram Temple's inauguration in Ayodhya. The woman was accompanied by a child. People present in the celebrations claimed that the woman wanted to disrupt peace. Speaking to the reporters, Shivamogga SP Mithun Kumar said a background check was conducted after she was taken into custody and her father claimed that she was mentally ill and had recently started treatment. "We are looking into medical documents," he said. Speaking about the case, Syed Abbas, the woman's father, said, "My daughter is mentally ill. We are treating her. She has left her husband's house for the past 10 months and is staying at my house."*—Salar News*

Tender for MTS Colony Land in Hubballi cancelled

HUBBALLI,22 JAN

The Railway Land Development Authority (RLDA) board has taken the decision to cancel the contentious tender process for leasing 13 acres of MTS Colony in Hubballi, a move that had been under scrutiny and generated considerable controversy. The tender, which sought to lease the prime 13-acre land in the heart of Hubballi for duration of 99 years, faced severe criticism and sparked a political storm. The Railway Land Development Authority had prominently displayed a notice stating that only 13 acres of land were available for lease, and the involvement of Union Minister Pralhad Joshi's name in this matter added fuel to the fire. The State Congress in-charge, Randeep Singh Surjewala, leveled serious allegations against Pralhad Joshi, accusing him of corruption amounting to 1300 crores and attempting to illegitimately acquire government land. Local leaders, including those from Kai, engaged in heated disputes over the matter, intensifying the political drama. In response to the situation, the Railway Authority Development Board has decided to cancel the process for leasing the land. *—Salar News*

Hindu organisations paint the City saffron

While City temples were busy, LED screens gave devotees the Ayodhya experience

BENGALURU, 22 JAN

In a vibrant display of devotion and celebration, Hindu organisations bathed the City in saffron hues in the wake of the consecration of Ram Temple in Ayodhya on Monday.

This occasion, rivalling the grandeur of the renowned Hindu festival Deepavali, saw the City adorned with saffron festoons, flags depicting Lord Ram, Hanuman, Sita, and Lakshmana, and welcoming posters marking the return of Ram to his birthplace after a 500-year hiatus.

Devotees flocked to Lord Ram and Hanuman temples, as well as Lord Venkateshwara temples. Melodious bhajans and 'keerthans' resonated, with special prayers held at prominent temples such as Ramanjaneya Gudda, Pattabhirama Swamy Temple, Rama Temple in Rajajinagar, Ramadevara Devasthana at Malleswaram and Rama Temple in Basavanagudi. These places also distributed 'prasad'.

The BJP State headquarters - Jagannath Bhavan - in Bengaluru was the centre of attraction with decorative lights, festoons, banners and posters. BJP State President and Shikaripura MLA BY Vijayendra, along with MLAs and former ministers participated in the Shri Rama Taraka Mahayaga - Kalasabhishekam at Rani Abbakka Ground in Mahalakshmi Layout. Hindu Janajagriti Samiti organised a procession.

Residents lauded the police for ensuring a peaceful atmosphere, and preventing any untoward incidents.

The police vigilantly cracked down on organisers using high-decibel DJ speakers. Notably, the sizable Jain community sponsored many events.

Most small shops and eateries remained closed, and app-based rides were unavailable for nearly an hour during the consecration ceremony.

Kaggalipura, a small village in the outskirts of Bengaluru organised a special pooja and deepotsava at Ganapati Temple on the day.

The celebration was organised by MA Parvez, a member of Gram Panchayat of Kaggalipura. "I am thrilled being among the devotees and this is how I contribute to the diversity of the society," Parvez told Salar News.

Many temples in villages along Kanakapura main road such as Tharalu, Saalu Hunase, Uddipalya, Lakshmipura, and even areas such as Banashankari and Jayanagar celebrated.

Sri Anjaneya Swami Bhakta Mandir at Uddipalya hosted bhajans and Deepotsava. Nimishamba Temple in Jayanagar hosted pooja, maha-mangalarthi and naivedyam, said its high priest Narasimhaswamy.

Kadu Mallikarjuna Swamy Temple organised a Ratha Yatra from Malleswaram to Kodanda Rama Temple in Seshadripuram. Ram Pratisthpane (sanctification of the idol of Ram Lalla) plays a significant role among Indians, said Swami Vishnu Bhattar of the temple. "Even after a 14-year exile period in Treta Yuga, he needed to wait for 500 years to enter his hometown Ayodhya. During these 500 years, many people sacrificed their lives to make this day a fortunate and victorious one. Prime Minister Narendra Modi has fulfilled the dreams of millions of Indians."

Near Palace Guttahalli, around 200 devotees gathered on a street.

Hindu Seva Trust put up stalls from Rajarajeshwari Nagar to Nayandahalli to distribute food, and a private hospital, which wished to be unnamed, in RR Nagar distributed fruits and food to all the patients. Shakdwipiya Brahmin Samaj distributed food to more than 2,000 people in TCM Royan Road. Shailendra Sharma of the organisation said, "There is nothing more than this happiness of distributing food at the Ram Janmabhoomi inauguration."

In Gali Anjaneyaswamy Temple in Vijayanagar, more than 2,000 devotees visited the temple on the special day.

On the premises of the temple, ISKCON followers sold books of Ramayana epic. Vamshi Krishna, a resident of Girinagar, selling the Ramayana, said, "The day Lord Ram returns to his home, we want people to take Ramayana home."

Auto drivers in City, especially in Old Guddadahalli and Hanumanthnagar, did pooja before the start of their day and hoisted Ram Navami flag. Global Mall, Mysuru Road, organised a live screening of the festival.

From the early hours, areas like Hamumanthnagar, Basavangudi, and Srinagar were decked up with colourful rangoli. Chickpete, one of the oldest areas, commenced its celebration at midnight. "Though Chickpete area has more of the garbage and uneven roads issue, we are here for people who ensured our safety," Vishwanath, a member of the parishad.

Apartment associations in IT tech hubs such as Varthur, Whitefield, and Brookfield added to the festive atmosphere by decorating their buildings with pandals and dressing up children as characters from Ramayana. *—Salar News with agencies (With inputs by Vaishnavi Gopalraj, Amullya Shivashankar, Vishal Mayur and Meghana Prasad)*

Devotees watch live telecast of Ayodhya's Ram Mandir inauguration on an led screen on St John's Road, Ulsoor, in Bengaluru on Monday *PHOTO: MOHAMMED ASAD*

RAM MANDIR INAUGURATION UNITED HINDUS: VIJAYENDRA

BENGALURU, 22 JAN

BJP State President and MLA BY Vijayendra on Monday said the wish of crores of Ram devotees was fulfilled through the inauguration of Ram temple in Ayodhya. He added the inauguration was a holy moment that unites Hindus.

Speaking to the reporters, he said, "Ayodhya and Kannadigas have an inseparable relationship. Every Kannadiga is proud today. It is a matter of great pride and joy."

Vijayendra said that Karnataka and Ayodhya have a deep connection as Hanuman was born in Kishkindha, Hampi.

"The stone for Lord Balarama's idol was sourced from Karnataka. Its sculptors also are from Karnataka," he said. *—Salar News*

Coastal K'taka joins the religious fervour

MANGALURU, 22 JAN

The 'Pran Pratishta' of Ram Lalla idol in Ayodhya was celebrated by devotees across the coastal areas of State on Monday.

Devotees thronged temples in Dakshina Kannada conducting pujas. Special pujas were at shrines including Kateel Sri Durgaparameshwari temple, Polali Sri Rajarajeshwari temple and Kudroli Sri Gokarnanatha temple. Special arrangements were made to watch the live telecast of the 'Prana Pratishta' in the district including temples.In Udupi Sri Krishna mutt, special prayers were offered at Lord Krishna temple on the auspicious day. 'Suvarna Kavacha Alankara Seve' was offered to Lord Krishna at the Krishna mutt. At the Paryaya Puthige mutt, a special 'Alankara Seve' for the idol of Lord Hanuman, with silver idols of Lord Ram and Seetha on his chest, was offered. *—PTI*

Dalits accused MP Pratap Simmha of neglecting them for the past decade and hurled anti-Dalit slogans *PHOTO: SALAR*

Dalits stop Simmha from attending pooja

MYSURU, 22 JAN

- The villages accused him of never visiting the village in 10 years and said that he was there now for political reasons. "You never bothered to listen to us, and we do not want you to come here," said another man

BJP MP Pratap Simmha on Monday was stopped by Dalits from participating in a foundation laying event of a temple in Mysuru's Gujjegowdanapura village, ahead of the Ram temple consecration ceremony in Ayodhya.

The bhoomi pooja was to be held for Ram temple construction, at the site where the black stone used to sculpt the Ram Lalla idol installed in Ayodhya was found.

Dalits accused the BJP MP of neglecting them for the past decade and hurled anti-Dalit slogans at him.

Simmha was also accused of making derogatory statements about Dalits.

MLA GT Deve Gowda had announced the construction of the Ram Mandir at the site.

While former minister SR Mahesh and Devegowda took part in the ceremony, Simmha was forced to leave.

The video of the incident went viral on social media. In the video, a man tells Simmha, "You haven't done anything. We have done everything. We also respect Lord Ram. Please get out."

The villages accused him of never visiting the village in 10 years and said that he was there now for political reasons. "You never bothered to listen to us, and we do not want you to come here," said another man.

Simmah is seen arguing with the angry mob but after a few minutes, a policewoman intervenes and escorts Simmha into his vehicle. *—Salar News*

'A BELIEVER, NOT ATHEIST'

CM opens Ram temple in namma B'luru

BENGALURU, 22 JAN

Rama Sita Lakshmana Temple, inaugurated by Siddaramaiah, has a 33-foot-high monolithic Anjaneya Swamy idol *PHOTO: PTI*

- God does not accept the dramatic worship filled with adharma and inhumane work, said Siddaramaiah inauguration of Lord Ram temple in Mahadevapura

God does not accept the dramatic worship filled with adharma and inhumane work, said Chief Minister Siddaramaiah during the inauguration of Lord Ram temple in Mahadevapura Constituency on Monday.

Rama Sita Lakshmana Temple, inaugurated by Siddaramaiah, has a 33-foot-high monolithic Anjaneya Swamy idol built by Hirandahalli Sri Rama Temple Trust.

"I am not an atheist, but a believer. I have built a temple of Ram in my village. No religion promotes hatred towards other castes and religions. Ram was a sociable person and he once paid heed to the words of a launderer. He went to exile obeying his father's orders," Siddaramaiah said.

"Mahatma Gandhi's last words were Hey Ram. We worship Gandhiji's Ram and not BJP's Ram. We are all devotees of Ram, but not as BJP says. We will go to Ayodhya," Siddaramaiah said.

The Congress leader highlighted peace and equality in society quoting Kuvempu poet. "Kuvempu's wish for Karnataka to be a garden of peace for all races lies in the ideals and personality of Ram. The message of Ramayana and Mahabharata is that man should not hate man," he said. Siddaramaiah said: "Ram is not someone's private property and it is the property of every devotee."

Siddaramaiah accused BJP of trying to seperate Lord Rama from Sita, Lakshmana and Anjaneya as only Lord Rama was installed in Ayodhya.

Reiterating his decision to not declare a holiday on Monday despite the pressure from Opposition, he said, "The central government has declared only a half-day holiday. No holiday has been declared in Delhi, Punjab, Telangana, West Bengal, Tamil Nadu and Kerala."

Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar on Monday took to X and said that Congress has created Rama Rajya in the State by providing the five guarantees.

Shivakumar posted on X: "We realised that through Rama ideology and Hanuman loyalty we have provided the guarantee we promised."

He further gave his best wishes for the inauguration of Ram temple in Ayodhya. *—Salar News*

Gas leak in Bidar kills 2; 8 hospitalised

BENGALURU, 22 JAN

Two people died and eight others were hospitalised after a poisonous gas leak at a chemical factory in the Humnabad industrial area in Bidar.

The deceased, Mohammed Shabad, 21, and Indrajeet,23, were working inside the Prasanna Pre-Processing Company Private Limited when the incident occurred on Sunday.

The eight affected individuals were rushed to the Taluk Hospital and are reportedly out of danger. Bidar Deputy Commissioner assured residents that the gas leak was not major and didn't pose risks to air quality in the area.

Police authorities visited the site, stopped operations at the company and initiated an investigation.

Forest Ecology and Environment Minister Ishwar Khandre instructed officials to review safety measures in industrial units to prevent such incidents.

He asked Environment Department officials to review the safety measures taken in the industrial units functioning in Bidar. *—Salar News*

Excise department deploys drone cameras to curb illicit liquor trade

KARWAR, 22 JAN

The surge in excise duty by the State government has led to a substantial increase in demand for Goan liquor, resulting in a rampant illegal transportation of liquor worth crores of rupees through sea and forest routes in Uttara Kannada, bordering Goa. To combat this illicit trade, the Excise Department has adopted a high-tech solution by deploying drones for surveillance.B Rupa, the Excise DC of Uttara Kannada Division, revealed that a dedicated team has been established to scrutinise all vehicles arriving from Goa to Karnataka. Cases are registered if illegal liquor smuggling is detected. Notably, a team of officers seized approximately 700 litres of Goan liquor and a motorcycle near Mudageri Dam.In regions such as Anamode in Karwar and Joida, sharing the border with Goa, the smugglers are transporting liquor worth crores into Karnataka under the vigilant gaze of excise officials. The tight border security has compelled the smugglers to explore alternative routes through water and forest areas to evade detection. Over the past three months, more than Rs 10 lakh worth of liquor has been seized, leading to the registration of more than 45 cases in forest areas.Basavaraj, an Excise officer, highlighted that drone cameras had previously proven effective in detecting cannabis and liquor in Shivamogga. *—Salar News*

PHOTO: PIXABAY

BRINGING BACK SMILES

Influencers, tandoori chai vendors bolster Pottery Town

AMULLYA SHIVASHANKAR
BENGALURU, 22 JAN

Winters are usually a hard time for families at Pottery Town in Benson Town here as pots take longer time to dry and there are hardly any customers to drop by. But in this cold season, fortunes are changing for 40-odd families at the Pottery Town, thanks to the growing number of social media influencers who drop by to try their hands at pottery making.

While the influencers on Instagram and YouTube are looking to offer new content for their followers, the potters have a new business plan to bank on. The potters charge around Rs 400 per hour from these content creators to try their hand at pottery making and take their small and precious creations back home. "At least five to six people visit a potter every week and this has become a significant part of our monthly income," Balaraju, a second-generation potter, told Salar News.

Adding to this new source of income are vendors of Tandoori Chai (tea poured into clay mugs and smoked to give a delicious twist). These Tandoori Chai vendors, who buy each glass at a rate of Rs 5, are a regular clientele of potters. With around 20 kilograms of clay, about 150 Tandoori Chai glasses with each having a capacity of 90 ml can be produced, a potter named Lakshmi said.

- The potters charge around Rs 400 per hour from these content creators to try their hand at pottery making and take their creations back home

These Tandoori Chai vendors come every week and place orders of up to 30,000 clay glasses from one potter, resulting in the town producing more than 1 lakh Chai glasses every month. "Almost every week, we get bulk orders from them (chai vendors). Each potter from this town has their own Chai vendors. These people cannot order from elsewhere either as everyone has their own customers," Lakshmi said.

Recently, the potters received an order for 28,000 diyas from Sri Ram Sene Trust which was used during the consecration of Ram Temple in Ayodhya.

The potters in the over 100-year-old town produce diverse products including incense stick holders, jugs, vessels and diyas.

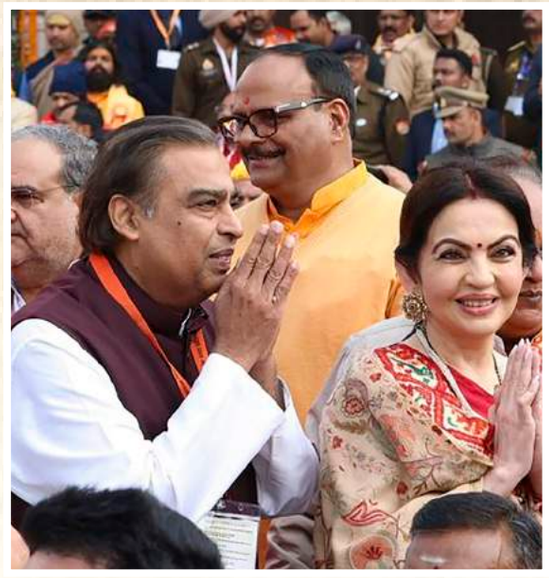
The roots of these potters can be traced back to Mysuru, with the Wodeyars royal family in Mysuruallocating Pottery Town in Benson Town for the production of clay lamps and vessels. *—Salar News*

Tandoori chai vendors place orders of up to 30,000 glasses *PHOTO: SALAR*

IN THE NAME OF RAM

The nation witnesses a religious frenzy as Ayodhya turns into a 'Hindu Vatican'

Flower petals being showered at the Ram Mandir during the 'Pran Pratishtha' ceremony, in Ayodhya, on Monday **PHOTO: PTI**



Reliance Industries Chairperson Mukesh Ambani with wife and Chairperson of Reliance Foundation Nita Ambani **PHOTO: PTI**

Bollywood actors Amitabh Bachchan with son Abhishek Bachchan **PHOTO: PTI**

Devotees participate in a Shobha Yatra on the consecration of Ayodhya's Ram Mandir, in Dehradun **PHOTO: PTI**

Actors Ayushmann Khurana, Alia Bhatt, Ranbir Kapoor, Vicky Kaushal, Katrina Kaif, Directors Rohit Shetty and Rajkumar Hirani **PHOTO: PTI**

Devotees participate in a procession on the occasion of consecration ceremony in Kolkata **PHOTO: PTI**

Actor Ram Charan **PHOTO: PTI**

People light 'diyas' to celebrate the inauguration of Ayodhya's Ram Temple, in New Delhi **PHOTO: PTI**

Mitali Raj and Saina Nehwal **PHOTO: PTI**

Actor Rajinikanth **PHOTO: PTI**

Uma Bharti and Sadhvi Rithambara have a cry **PHOTO: PTI**

PARENTS GO FOR 'MUHURAT' CHILD

BENGALURU/MUMBAI, 22 JAN

Hoping for an "auspicious" start for their newborns, many couples had 'muhurat deliveries', planned in consultation with doctors, in hospitals on Monday coinciding with the Ram Lalla idol consecration in Ayodhya.While 'Ram' and 'Sita' were the preferred names for many, a baby boy born to a Muslim family in the district hospital in Firozabad, Uttar Pradesh, was named Ram Rahim by his grandmother. Dr Naveen Jain, incharge of the district women's hospital, said that the woman, Farzana, gave birth to a baby boy and "the child's grandmother Husna Banu has named him Ram Rahim" saying she wanted to give a "message of Hindu-Muslim unity".JSS Super Speciality Hospital

PHOTO: PTI

run by the 'Shri Siddeshwar Loka Kalyana Charitable Trust in Karnataka's Vijayapura had special requests from over 50 pregnant women to align their delivery dates for 22 January and has conducted over 20 deliveries on Monday.

"We had special requests from over 50 pregnant women to align their delivery dates for 22 January... since it is Lord Ram's day," Leelavati CA, Head HR, told PTI. "Since, there were several requests, after looking at the medical condition of the expecting mothers and multiple scanning, we could schedule the delivery of over 20 pregnant women for 22 January.

"Today alone, we have carried out delivery of more than 20 women so far and still operation threatres are full and scanning is still being carried out to schedule the next line of deliveries," the hospital official said. The hospital had announced free delivery of newborns at its facility from January 18 to 22 January and carried out over 100 deliveries during the specified period, according to the hospital administration.It organised a "cradle ceremony" on 22 January of which three newborns - two baby boys and a baby girl - were a part as "Lord Ram, Sita and Lakshman". —*PTI*

PM offers prayers at Shiva temple

Ayodhya, 22 Jan

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Monday visited the Kuber Tila on the Ram temple premises in Ayodhya and offered prayers to Lord Shiva there. He performed 'jalabhishek' (pouring water on the 'Shiva linga') and also did a 'parikrama' (circumambulation) of the temple. TModi later unveiled a statue of Jatayu, a mythical bird that was killed by Ravana while trying to save Goddess Sita from the demon king, on the premises of the Ayodhya temple. —*PTI*

Ker CM slams state's role in ceremony

T'puram, 22 Jan

Kerala Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan on Monday sharply criticised the state role in the Ram Temple consecration at Ayodhya, saying the line that demarcates religion and state seems to be "getting thinner and thinner." Few hours after Prime Minister Narendra Modi inaugurated the consecration of the Ram Temple, Vijayan in a message said that a time has come when the inauguration of a religious place of worship in the country was being celebrated as a state event. —*PTI*

Temple inauguration shows majoritarianism: Pakistan

Islamabad, 22 Jan

Pakistan on Monday said the inauguration of the Ram temple in Ayodhya is indicative of growing majoritarianism in India. The remarks by Pakistan's Foreign Office (FO) came after the new Ram Lalla idol was consecrated at the Ayodhya temple on Monday in an event led by Prime Minister Narendra Modi. "Developments of the last 31 years, leading to today's consecration ceremony, are indicative of growing majoritarianism in India. These constitute an important facet of the ongoing efforts for social, economic and political marginalisation of the Indian Muslims," the FO said in a statement. —*PTI*

CARVED IN STONE WITH NO SAND OR IRON

The entire temple structure will be 3 storeys

AYODHYA, 22 JAN

A new landmark of India -- both structural and spiritual -- rises on Ayodhya's horizon on Monday as a new-age architectural marvel of elegant sandstones, diligently carved by craftspeople with dedication and devotion to Lord Ram.

The majestic Ram temple in Ayodhya is a sprawling structure, built by overcoming engineering challenges and with due sensitivity to nature.

Champat Rai, General Secretary of the Sri Ram Janmabhoomi Teerth Kshetra, said the temple's construction is the result of "collective wisdom" of "some of the best brains in the country".

No iron or steel has been used in the construction of the grand structure. Stones have been sourced from Rajasthan's Bansi Paharpur area.

The temple complex, built in the traditional Nagara style, will be 380 feet long from the east to the west **PHOTO: PTI**

Rai said, "The entire temple superstructure will eventually be three storeys -- G+2." Visitors will climb 32 steps from the eastern side to reach the main temple.

The temple complex, built in the traditional Nagara style, will be 380 feet long from the east to the west, 250 feet wide and 161 feet high. Each floor of the temple will be 20 feet high and have a total 392 pillars and 44 gates. During the excavation work, it was found that the ground was unsuitable for laying the foundation stone, a challenge that engineers overcame by creating an "artificial foundation" over which the superstructure sits.Images of Lord Hanuman, other deities, peacocks and flower patterns have been carved onto the stones, lending the structure a divine look. More than 3,000kgs of flowers of over 20 varieties have been used to decorate the grand structure, Sanjay Dhawalikar, head of the floral decoration team, told PTI on Sunday. —*PTI*

IAF's mobile service saves devotee's life

AYODHYA, 22 JAN

In a timely medical intervention, a mobile hospital of the IAF's rapid response team saved a devotee who suffered a heart attack while attending the 'Pran Pratishtha' event at the Ram temple here on Monday.After Ramkrishna Srivastava, 65, collapsed inside the temple complex, a team of BHISHM Cube evacuated him within a minute of the incident and provided on-site treatment,a statement said. The response team provided him preliminary treatment at the site. —*PTI*

Stones pelted at 'Shobha yatra' in Guj; 1 injured

VADODARA, 22 JAN

Stones were pelted on Monday evening on a procession taken out in Vadodara in Gujarat to celebrate the idol consecration of the Ram Temple in Ayodhya, police said. One person was injured in the incident that took place during a 'shobha yatra' in Bhoj in Padra taluka and a combing operation has been launched to nab three to four persons who pelted stones, VadodaraSuperintendent of Police Rohan Anand said. " Police personnels brought the situation under control." he said. —*PTI*

Cong minister from HP attends consecration

SHIMLA, 22 JAN

Deviating from his party line, Himachal Pradesh minister Vikramaditya Singh, who is the son of state Congress Chief Pratibha Singh, reached Ayodhya on Monday to attend the consecration ceremony at the Ram temple. Another Congress MLA from the state Sudhir Sharma also reached Ayodhya for the ceremony. On receiving the invitation to the ceremony earlier, Singh had promised to attend it, but later changed his stand with the Congress high command declining the invite to the event. —*PTI*

'Mangal Dhwani' resonates in Ram temple

AYODHYA, 22 JAN

The Ram Mandir consecration ceremony at Ayodhya had fifty traditional musical instruments from across the country to be part of a devotional "Mangal Dhwani" that resonated during the ceremony on Monday.The instruments included pakhawaj, flute and dholak from Uttar Pradesh, veena from Karnataka, algoja from Punjab, sundari from Maharashtra, mardala from Odisha; santoor from Madhya Pradesh, pung from Manipur, nagada and kali from Assam; and tambura from Chhattisgarh. —*PTI*

SCULPTOR'S PRIDE

It was all worth it, feel I am luckiest person: Yogiraj

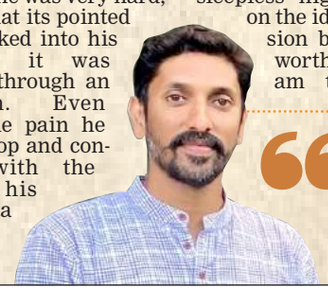
AYODHYA, 22 JAN

Mysuru-based sculptor Arun Yogiraj, who chiselled the 'Ram Lalla' idol consecrated in the Ram temple in Ayodhya, on Monday, says he considers himself the luckiest person on the earth and believes that its Lord Ram who chose him for the task."I have always felt that Lord Ram has been shielding me and my family from all the bad times and I strongly believe that it is him, who chose me for the auspicious task," Yogiraj said.

While it was a proud moment for him to witness the historic event in person, his family back in Mysuru witnessed the ceremony live on TV.

"The stone was very hard, so hard that its pointed flake pricked into his eye and it was removed through an operation. Even during the pain he did not stop and continued with the work," his wife Vijeta said.

"I spent sleepless nights working on the idol with precision but it was all worth it. I feel I am the luckiest person on the earth and today is the best day of my life," he said. An MBA from the University of Mysore, Arun Yogiraj trained for six months in the HR Department of a private company. "But I listened to my inner voice and left the private sector job and returned to Mysuru to carry forward the family tradition," he said.



> **I spent sleepless nights working on the idol with precision but it was all worth it. I feel I am the luckiest person on the earth and today is the best day of my life**
>
> -Arun Yogiraj

Yogiraj had earlier sculpted the 12-foot-tall idol of Adi Shankaracharya, which has been placed in Kedarnath. —*PTI*

PHOTO: X/ANUBRATA MONDAL

TMS leader's bail plea adjourned to 27 Feb

NEW DELHI, 22 JAN

**Supreme Court on Monday adjourned to 27 February the hearing on the bail plea moved by Trinamool Congress (TMC) leader Anubrata Mondal, arrested in connection with a cattle-smuggling case.A bench of Justice Bela M Trivedi and Justice Pankaj Mithal, meanwhile, directed the lower court to proceed with the trial on 22 February.During the hearing, senior advocate Mukul Rohatgi, appearing on behalf of Mondal, submitted that four charge sheets have been filed in the case and everybody is out of jail except the TMC leader.He told the court that Mondal is in jail for one-and-half years while the main accused has got bail in the case."There are 309 witnesses. I am the only person who is in jail while others have got bail," Rohatgi told the court adding that the trial is not progressing in the case.—*PTI*

No respite from cold conditions in Pb and H'yana

CHANDIGARH, 22 JAN

**Cold conditions continued unabated in Punjab and Haryana on Monday, with temperatures hovering below normal at several places.The Met office in Chandigarh said Bathinda in Punjab reeled from severe cold, recording a low of 4 degrees Celsius.Gurdaspur also experienced a cold night, recording a minimum temperature of 4.5 degrees Celsius. The night temperature in Faridkot was recorded at 5 degrees Celsius, followed by Ludhiana at 5.6 degrees and Patiala at 5.8 degrees.Amritsar registered a night temperature of 7 degrees Celsius.Chandigarh, the common capital of the two states, reeled from the severe cold with the minimum temperature being recorded at 6.5 degrees Celsius.In Haryana, a cold wave swept several places, including Sirsa, Hisar. —*PTI*

Complaint against ex-Haryana MLA in illegal mining

CHANDIGARH, 22 JAN

**Enforcement Directorate has filed an FIR with the police against former Haryana MLA Dilbag Singh and a dozen others allegedly associated with him on charges of illegal mining and "diverting" the flow of the River Yamuna.The federal agency had raided the former Indian National Lok Dal (INLD) legislator from Yamunanagar assembly seat, Congress MLA from Sonipat Surender Panwar and their linked entities earlier this month in an alleged illegal mining linked money laundering case.It had arrested Dilbag Singh and his associate Kulwinder Singh after raiding about 20 premises of the two politicians and their linked persons in Yamunanagar, Sonipat, Mohali, Faridabad, Chandigarh, and Karnal. These searches were based on a case that took cognisance of multiple FIRs of the Haryana Police regarding illegal mining of boulders, gravel and sand that took place in the past in Yamunanagar and nearby districts even after the lease expiry period and the National Green Tribunal's order. —*PTI*

Road crash leaves five dead in Rajasthan

JAIPUR, 22 JAN

Five friends were killed when their SUV overturned after hitting a road divider on the Gogunda-Pindwada highway in Udaipur district of Rajasthan, police said on Monday.The accident occurred on Sunday night under Bekaria police station. SHO, Prabhu Singh, said while three men died on the spot, two others died on way to a hospital.The deceased were identified as Bhima, Nathu Garasia, Poonaram Garasia, Manohar Garasia and Mukesh. All of them were in the 22-25 age group. —*PTI*

Rahul asked not to hold street-corner meet in Assam

DC warned of miscreants trying to disrupt peace in state amid yatra

MORIGAON, 22 JAN

Morigaon district commissioner has asked Congress leader Rahul Gandhi to refrain from holding a street-corner meeting and a padayatra as a part of the Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra as miscreants may try to disrupt peace and tranquility in the district.

On the basis of intelligence inputs, the district administration "apprehends the involvement of miscreants who may try to disrupt the peace and tranquility of the district by indulging in anti-social activities taking advantage of two major events happening on the same day —The Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra and the Ram Lalla Pran Pratistha — simultaneously", district commissioner Devashis Sarma said in a letter to district Congress functionaries.

In the interest of the Congress leader's safety and security, "we would like to request you not to stop his vehicle or carcade during his roadshow at Morigaon district till he reaches the Golsepa alighting point for lunch and rest", the DC said.

"This negates all earlier permissions accorded by the district administration for holding any public meeting/padyatra in Morigaon district in connection with the Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra on January 22", the letter added.

Meanwhile, the state Director General of Police GP Singh posted on 'X' that the organisers of the yatra are advised to stick to resolutions of the ASL since Z+ category prominent personality (PP) is part of the event.

Singh said unscheduled stoppages should be avoided and "the ASL PP may be advised not to leave the vehicle without advance intimation to local administration and police".

The participants of the road event are advised not to physically counter localised political protests to the event and leave the same to the deployed and/or accompanying police contingent, he said.

Gandhi was barred from visiting the birthplace of iconic Vaishnav saint Srimanta Sankardeva earlier in the day on the ground that a law and order problem may arise during his visit as many organisations were planning to hold events related to the consecration of the Ram Temple in Ayodhya.

The managing committee of the Sri Sankardeva Sattra on Sunday had announced that they will not allow the Congress leader to visit the shrine before 3pm on January 22 after Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma had earlier in the day said at a press conference that he requested Gandhi not to visit before the consecration of the Ram Temple in Ayodhya.

—*PTI*

Rahul Gandhi with party leaders and supporters protests after he was not allowed to visit the Sri Sri Sankar Dev Satra during the Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra in Assam on Monday **PHOTO: PTI**

- RaGa was barred from visiting the birthplace of iconic Vaishnav saint Srimanta Sankardeva on the ground that a law and order problem may arise during his visit as events were organised related to temple consecration

NewsClick's HR head withdraws from SC plea

NEW DELHI, 22 JAN

NewsClick's human resources department head Amit Chakravarty on Monday withdrew from the Supreme Court his petition against his arrest under the anti-terror law, the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act (UAPA).

Earlier this month, a Delhi court had allowed Chakravarty to turn an approver in the case lodged against the news portal under UAPA over allegations that it received money to spread pro-China propaganda.

The separate pleas filed by Chakravarty and NewsClick founder Prabir Purkayastha against their arrest under the anti-terror law came up for hearing before a bench headed by Justice BR Gavai.

An advocate appearing in the matter requested the bench, also comprising Justices Sanjay Karol and Sandeep Mehta, that Chakravarty be allowed to withdraw his plea.

"Let him withdraw if he wants to withdraw," Additional Solicitor General SV Raju, representing the Delhi Police, told the bench, while responding to the lawyer's prayer.

Amit Chakravarty **PHOTO: FACEBOOK**

The bench allowed Chakravarty to withdraw the plea.

Raju told the bench that the other petition filed by Purkayastha has to be heard.

The bench posted the matter for hearing on 30 January.

A Delhi court had earlier this month pardoned Chakravarty on an application he moved seeking the court's permission to turn an approver.

Chakravarty had claimed he was in possession of "material information" about the case which he was willing to disclose to the Delhi Police.

The court refused to grant them relief, saying there was no procedural infirmity or violation of the provisions of the UAPA in arresting them. —*PTI*

2 groups clash during Ram rally in Mumbai; 6 detained

MUMBAI, 22 JAN

A clash broke out between members of two communities during a vehicle rally on the outskirts of Mumbai following which six people were detained, police said on Monday.

Tension gripped the area at around 10.30 pm on Sunday when a group of 10 to 12 people in three cars and on as many motorcycles were taking out a rally from Naya Nagar under Mira Bhayandar police jurisdiction and chanting slogans in praise of Lord Ram, ahead of the Ram temple consecration ceremony in Ayodhya on Monday.

While chanting slogans, some of the persons allegedly burst firecrackers, following which a group of locals came out with wooden sticks. They had an argument with the participants and attacked their vehicles, an official said. The people moving on the vehicles were also thrashed, he said.

The police quickly intervened and the attackers were dispersed.

Heavy police security was placed in the area to prevent any law and order issue further, the official said.Besides local police personnel, a platoon of the Riot Control Police (RCP) was also deployed, he said.

The situation in the area was under control, the official added. —*PTI*

To control the situation, a platoon of the Riot Control Police (RCP) was also deployed **PHOTO: SCREENGRAB**

HC suspends website offering Ayodhya prasad

NEW DELHI, 22 JAN

Delhi High Court has ordered suspension of the operations of a website "preying on the public's religious beliefs" and deceiving them by allegedly promoting itself as the official platform for delivery of 'prasad' from the Pran Pratishtha ceremony at the Shri Ram Temple in Ayodhya.Plaintiff however, argued that the defendants have no right to misappropriate its registered "Khadi" mark and render a false impression that it was affiliated with the Shri Ram Janmabhoomi Teerth Kshetra Trust, which is organising the consecration ceremony. Court opined there was a prima facie case in favour and if the ex-parte interim injunction is not granted, it would suffer an irreparable loss. —*PTI*

GUARDS UP

Security personnel outside Delhi Jama Masjid on the day of Ayodhya Ram Mandir 'Pran pratishtha', in Delhi, on Monday **PHOTO: PTI**

Manipur CM holds meet on clashes

IMPHAL, 22 JAN

Manipur Chief Minister N Biren Singh said he has chaired a meeting with representatives of 10 political parties to address the current situation in the ethnic violence-hit state.

He also said "constructive discussions" were held during the meeting at the CM secretariat on Sunday.

"Chaired a meeting with representatives of the 10 political parties at my secretariat to address the current situation in Manipur.

"Constructive discussions were held, reflecting a united commitment to navigate challenges and work collectively for the well-being of our state," Singh said on social media.

After Sunday's meeting, Congress Legislative Party leader Okram Ibobi said the "10 political parties have urged the chief minister to seek an appointment with the prime minister and his intervention to end the more-than-8-month-long crisis". —*PTI*

1,088 farmers died by suicide in Marathwada

CHHATRAPATI SAMBHAJINAGAR, 22 JAN

As many as 1,088 farmers died by suicide in eight districts of Marathwada in 2023, a report from the divisional commissioner's office revealed. The figure has gone up by 65 compared to 2022, an official said. Of the 1,088 suicides in 2023, Beed recorded the highest 269 such deaths, followed by 182 in Chhatrapati Sambhajinagar, 175 in Nanded, 171 in Dharashiv and 103 in Parbhani, it stated. —*PTI*

All 11 convicts surrender at Godhra jail in Bilkis Bano case

GODHRA, 22 JAN

All 11 convicts in the Bilkis Bano case have surrendered at the Godhra sub jail in Gujarat's Panchmahal district in keeping with the deadline set by the Supreme Court.

The 11 convicts surrendered before jail authorities late Sunday night, local Crime Branch inspector NL Desai said.

"They reached the jail before midnight of 21 January, which was the deadline set for them to surrender," he said.

The top court on 8 January annulled the remission granted by the Gujarat government to the 11 convicts in the high-profile case while slamming the state for being "complicit" with an accused and abusing its discretion. It ordered the convicts, who were released prematurely on Independence Day in 2022, to go back to jail within two weeks.

The apex court on Friday rejected pleas of the convicts for grant of more time to surrender and asked them to do so by Sunday.

On 15 August, 2022, the 11 convicts, who spent 14 years in jail as part of the life sentence, were granted premature release.Later the remission order was quashed by the Supreme Court.

Convicts moved the court seeking more time to surrender on grounds such as failing health, impending surgery, son's marriage —*PTI*

Convicts, who were earlier honoured with garlands, had moved court seeking time to surrender on grounds such as poor health **PHOTO: X**

Mamata offers prayers during all-faith rally in Kolkata

KOLKATA, 22 JAN

West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee on Monday embarked on a symbolic journey of religious harmony, while leading an all-faith rally that included visits to diverse places of worship, such as a temple, mosque, church, and gurdwara, aligning with the consecration ceremony of the Ram temple in Ayodhya earlier in the day.

Accompanied by religious leaders from various faiths and key party members, the Trinamool Congress (TMC) supremo initiated the 'Sanghati March' from Hazra More in the metropolis.

Notable among the attendees was her nephew and TMC national general secretary, Abhishek.

Prior to commencing the rally, Banerjee commenced the day by offering prayers at the iconic Kalighat temple in south Kolkata, seeking blessings from Goddess Kali.

The all-faith harmony rally then set off from Hazra More, heading towards Park Circus Maidan.During the journey, Banerjee continued her inclusive approach by offering prayers at a gurdwara, a church, and a mosque in proximity to Park Circus Maidan, the diverse religious interactions aimed at fostering communal harmony in the city. —*PTI*

West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee takes part in an all-faith rally, in Kolkata, on Monday **PHOTO: PTI**

ON MOON

NASA spacecraft 'pings' Chandrayaan-3

NEW DELHI, 22 JAN

Laser instrument onboard a NASA spacecraft orbiting the Moon has successfully pinged the Vikram lander of India's Chandrayaan-3 mission, the US space agency said.

The laser beam was transmitted and reflected between the Lunar Reconnaissance Orbiter (LRO) and an Oreo-sized device on Vikram lander, opening the door to a new style of precisely locating targets on the Moon's surface, NASA said.

The lander was 100 kilometers away from LRO, near Manzinus crater in the Moon's south pole region, when LRO transmitted laser pulses toward it on 12 December last year.

After the orbiter registered light that had bounced back from a tiny NASA retroreflector aboard Vikram, NASA scientists knew their technique had finally worked.

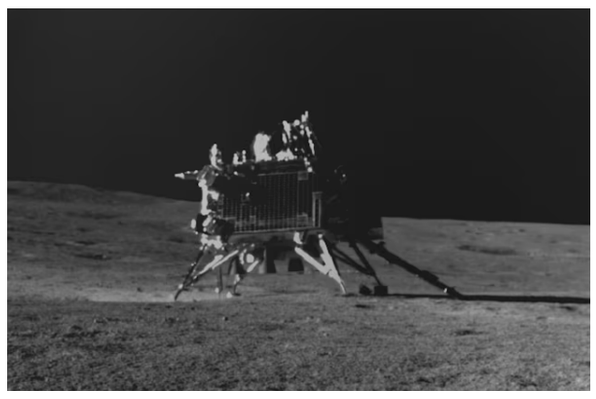
Sending laser pulses towards an object and measuring how long it takes the light to bounce back is a commonly used way to track the locations of Earth-orbiting satellites from the ground.

However, using the technique in reverse—to send laser pulses from a moving spacecraft to a stationary one to determine its precise location—has many applications at the Moon, scientists said.

"We've showed that we can locate our retroreflector on the surface from the Moon's orbit," said Xiaoli Sun, who led the team at NASA's Goddard Space Flight Center, that developed the retroreflector on Vikram as part of a partnership between NASA and Indian Space Research Organization (ISRO).

Reacting to the development, ISRO said the Laser Retroreflector Array (LRA) on the Chandrayaan-3 lander has begun serving as a fiducial point (precisely located markers for reference) on the Moon.

—*PTI*



Sending laser pulses to an object and measuring how long it takes light to bounce back is used to track satellites **PHOTO: X/ISRO**

A TREAT FOR THE EYES

Revellers parade during a pre-carnival street party rehearsal of the "Orquestra Voadora" block or Flying Orchestra in Rio de Janeiro, in Brazil
PHOTO: PTI

Modi brings Ram temple to life amid backlash

Prime Minister Narendra Modi has inaugurated a grand temple to Hindu god Ram in the flashpoint city of Ayodhya.

The temple replaces a 16th-Century mosque razed by Hindu mobs in 1992. The demolition had sparked nationwide riots in which nearly 2,000 people died.

Thousands of invited guests, including top film stars and cricketers, attended the event in Ayodhya.

But some Hindu seers and most of the opposition boycotted it, saying Modi was using it for political gains.

General elections are due in India in the next few months and Modi's political rivals say the governing Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) will be seeking votes in the temple's name in a country where 80 per cent of the population is Hindu.

Critics have also accused the government of going overboard with what is essentially a religious celebration in a country which - according to its constitution - is secular.

The temple has been constructed at a cost of $217m (£170m) - the temple trust says it's been funded from private donations.

The ceremony, which was televised live, showed Modi performing religious rituals inside the temple's sanctum along with priests and Mohan Bhagwat, head of Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) - the ideological fountainhead of Hindu nationalist parties. Only the ground floor of the temple was opened - the rest of the structure is expected to be completed only by the end of the year.

The ceremony, called Pran Pratishtha, which loosely translates from Sanskrit into "establishment of life force", lasted about an hour. Hindus believe that chanting of mantras and a set of rituals performed around a fire will infuse sacred life in an idol or a photograph of a deity.

The temple fulfils a decades-long Hindu nationalist pledge to build a shrine to Lord Ram in Ayodhya - the flashpoint city is getting a major makeover to transform it into a destination for pilgrims and tourists from across the world.

Minister Narendra Modi and Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) Chief Mohan Bhagwat offer prayers before the idol of Ram Lalla during the 'Pran Pratishtha' rituals at the Ram Mandir, in Ayodhya
PHOTO: PTI

Many Hindus believe that Ayodhya is the birthplace of Ram and the Babri mosque was built by Muslim invaders on the ruins of a Ram temple at the exact spot where the Hindu god was born. The movement to build a temple at the same site was a major factor that propelled the BJP into political prominence in the 1990s.

A protracted legal battle about the ownership of the land followed the mosque's demolition. It was resolved in 2019 when the Supreme Court gave the disputed land to the Hindus. While the Muslims were given a separate plot, 255km outside the city to build a mosque.

In Ayodhya, some Muslims told the BBC before the event that the day evoked fear and painful memories for them. Some said they would send their children out of the city, fearing tensions might be stoked when the streets filled with Hindu devotees from around the country.

The new three-storey temple - made with pink sandstone and anchored by black granite - stretches across 7.2 acres in a 70-acre complex. A 51-inch (4.25-ft) statue of the deity, specially commissioned for the temple, was unveiled last week. The idol has been placed on a marble pedestal in the sanctum sanctorum.

Since Monday morning in Ayodhya, all roads have led to the new temple. Thousands of policemen have been deployed to ensure security and manage traffic. Saffron-coloured flags of the BJP and those with images of Hindu gods dot major roads, many of which have been decorated with bright yellow and orange marigold flowers.

Some of India's biggest celebrities, including Bollywood star Amitabh Bachchan and cricketer Sachin Tendulkar, were among those who attended the event.

To avoid crowding in the small city, Modi had appealed to pilgrims to not turn up in Ayodhya in large numbers but to watch the ceremony live on television.

To facilitate that, all the BJP-ruled states have shut schools and colleges and declared a full or a half-day government holiday and stock markets are shut to encourage people to watch the ceremony.

—BBC News

SALAR ساڈھ

Indian study finds new path for incisionless surgery

A completely incisionless device that replicates metabolic surgery without making any cuts could surpass current technologies for managing conditions such as severe obesity and type 2 diabetes, a team led by an Indian researcher has found.

The ForePass device could provide unmatched treatment for millions of people who reject invasive surgery or do not respond to drugs, the researchers said. The study led by Manoel Galvao Neto, from Sri Aurobindo Medical College in Madhya Pradesh, found that the ForePass endoscopic showed extraordinary efficacy in treating conditions such as severe obesity, type 2 diabetes, and metabolic dysfunction-associated steatohepatitis (MASH). Results, published in the journal Gut, revealed a 79 per cent reduction in weight gain compared to the control group, suggesting it may be substantially more effective than common metabolic surgeries like gastric bypass.

The study also showed substantial improvements in how the body handles insulin and reduces glucose in the liver compared to controls, the researchers said. It found markedly improved response to insulin, enhanced use of glucose, and beneficial changes in metabolic health-related gut bacteria, they said. "The ForePass device will be a game-changer for treating severe metabolic conditions.

It replicates the effects of metabolic surgery without invasive procedures and without making any cuts to internal organ. It's the first device of its kind and will pave the way for a new era in managing severe metabolic conditions," said Neto.

The study also showed substantial improvements in how the body handles insulin
PHOTO: PIXABAY

"It is a crucial development, as only 1 per cent of patients opt for bariatric surgery due to itsinvasive nature. The medical community is eagerly anticipating the upcoming clinical trials involving the ForePass device," he added.

ForePass is an innovative device that combines a gastric balloon crossed by a central channel

that connects to a flexible intestinal sleeve, thereby effectively replicating the mechanism of

invasive metabolic surgery without the need for surgery or making any incisions, according to the researchers.

The device is inserted into the stomach and initial tract of the small intestine using endoscopy, a

much less invasive and cheaper procedure compared to metabolic surgery, they said.

Unlike metabolic surgery, ForePass is fully reversible, making it an appealing option for patients.

For the study, pigs were implanted with ForePass for a month, and the device demonstrated a

significant 79 per cent decrease in weight gain and marked enhancements in glucose balance compared to control animals who were not implanted with the device.

It also favourably altered fecal microbiota, boosting bacteria linked to metabolic well-being.

These outcomes align with a reversal of severe obesity, diabetes, and MASH, indicating an overall improvement in metabolic health, the researchers added.

—PTI

The ForePass device can provide treatment for millions who reject invasive surgery
PHOTO: PIXABAY

LETTERS

Write to us at salar@salar.news

India seeks stronger ties with South Asian govts, snubs ethnic minorities

India's regional politics are shifting. It is seeking to strengthen ties with South Asian ruling elites, including in Nepal and Sri Lanka, while ignoring ongoing ethnic uprisings in those countries in the hopes of securing its geopolitical interests.

The Indian government's opposition to ethnic rights within its own borders is well-documented. In 2019, for example, Narendra Modi's government decided to revoke Jammu and Kashmir's special status as an autonomous region, a move recently upheld by India's Supreme Court.

Jammu and Kashmir lost their constitution, flag and criminal code, and has been turned into two federally administered territories. India has also failed to manage ethnic conflicts in other territories, including Tamil Nadu, Punjab and Nagaland.

Indian hypocrisy

Ironically, the Indian government backs ethnic movements in other South Asian countries. It supports or has supported the Madheshi movement in Nepal, the Bengali liberation war in Pakistan and Tamils in Sri Lanka.

Because of its domestic record on ethnic rights, however, India lacks any moral authority to support them elsewhere. Instead, it's now pursuing a policy of pleasing the ruling elites in its neighbourhood, which it hopes will serve its national aspirations to become a regional powerhouse like China.

So far, that policy has had a limited payoff.

India has been making amends to Nepal since 2015, when it imposed a blockade and obstructed the transportation of petroleum products to Nepal. It wanted to force the Nepalese government to incorporate Madheshi demands in the Nepali constitution. Nepal refused and, instead, tabled its constitution without addressing Madheshi concerns.

It also signed trade and transit agreements with China to minimize Nepal's dependence on India.

In response, India quietly withdrew its sanctions, and has sincerefrained from pressuring Nepalese authorities. The ruling elites and Madheshi leaders were critical of India's interference. In short, India paid a high strategic price for the blockade.

Past Indian missteps

India has had similar missteps in the past.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi welcoming Sri Lankan President Ranil Wickremesinghe; PM talking to his Nepali counterpart Pushpa Kamal Dahal Prachanda
PHOTOS: AP, PTI

It involved itself in the ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka in the early 1980s, irritating both government officials and insurgents. India ultimately stepped aside, and Sri Lanka overcame its ethnic strife with Chinese military and financial assistance.

In 1971, India intervened in the ethnic conflict in Pakistan when Bengali Muslims pursued independent statehood to become modern-day Bangladesh. This support escalated already tense Indian-Pakistani relations.

Even after Bangladesh's independence, ethnic tensions persisted. Jumma peoples fought against the Bangladesh government's decision to transfer Bengali Muslims to the Chittagong Hill Tracts, the contested homeland of Indigenous minorities.

India supported their struggle by providing refuge to the displaced Jumma people in its Tripura state.

All of these efforts — past and present — to support ethnic movements in neighbouring countries have failed to help India achieve major player status in the region. Instead, they resulted in tense relations with ruling governments for years.

Appeasement efforts

That's why India is in the process of mending ties with the ruling elites in South Asia. Its support for the governments of Sri Lanka and Nepal gives some hints about its future direction.

Sri Lanka has been facing global criticism for failing to prosecute war crimes and human rights violations that occurred during 25 years of ethnic conflict. The United Nations Human Rights Council demanded in 2023 that the government act promptly to address gross human rights violations.

While India supported previous UN resolutions on this issue in 2012 and 2013, it consecutively abstained from supporting the last two resolutions, indicating a shift in the Indian approach towards Sri Lanka's ethnic tensions.

Likewise, India has stayed silent about the Madheshi demands in Nepal since 2015, and Indian parliament has passed resolutions that focus on mending ties with Nepal.

These gestures are part of an Indian policy to prioritize the neighbourhood in its foreign relations.

Based on this policy, India can be expected to seek stronger ties with other neighbouring countries too.

India's gains, minorities' losses?

These initiatives may help India minimize China's influence in the region, but minorities will lose global backing.South Asian ethnic movements have not received significant international attention and support.In the past, most of the support was coming from India. In the absence of Indian backing, ethnic minorities lack substantive global allies, which their governments can capitalise upon to further ignore or oppress them.

—Courtesy, The Conversation

Iranian soldier kills 5 comrades in Southeastern city

TEHRAN, 22 JAN

An Iranian soldier opened fire on fellow soldiers Sunday, killing five of them in the southeastern city of Kerman, where 94 people were killed in a bombing attack earlier this month, Iranian state TV reported. State TV said the shooting happened when the soldier arrived at a barracks dormitory and opened fire on the resting soldiers. It said the motive wasn't immediately clear and the suspect, who wasn't identified, was at large. No other details were released. The report said the attack took place in Kerman some 830 kilometres, southeast of the capital Tehran. Kerman was the scene of two deadly explosions earlier this month that killed 94 people and wounded hundreds of others during an anniversary ceremony for the death of an Iranian general killed in a 2020 US drone strike in Iraq. The Islamic State group claimed responsibility. *—AP*

PHOTO: X

Philippines Prez takes helicopter to Coldplay concert

MANILA, 22 JAN

The President of the Philippines is facing criticism on social media for using a presidential helicopter to attend a Coldplay concert in a province north of the capital, Manila. Ferdinand Marcos Jr and his wife were spotted arriving at the Philippine Arena via helicopter on Friday. Critics have called this a misuse of government resources. Marcos Jr's office defended the move, citing "unforeseen traffic complications". The head of Mr Marcos' Presidential Security Group (PSG), Brig Gen Jesus Nelson Morales, said in a statement published on Saturday that the "unprecedented influx of 40,000 individuals eagerly attending a concert" resulted in traffic complications, and that this posed a security threat to the President." *—BBC News*

2nd Boeing model to be inspected after blowout

WASHINGTON, 22 JAN

Checks are to be carried out on a second Boeing aircraft model following the blowout of an unused door on one of its planes earlier this month. The US Federal Aviation Administration grounded more than 170 of the 737 Max 9 fleet after a cabin panel broke away thousands of feet above the ground. On Sunday, the agency said airlines should also inspect older 737-900ER models, which use the same door design. The FAA described the move as an "added layer of safety". It said there had been no reported issues with the 737-900ER, but that it uses the same style of panel to "plug" an unused door as the plane involved in the terrifying 5 January incident. An Alaska Airlines flight en route to California from Portland, Oregon was forced to make an emergency landing after the panel came away, leaving a gaping hole in the side of the aircraft. *—BBC News*

SL church to declare Easter Sunday bomb attack victims saints

COLOMBO, 22 JAN

Sri Lanka's Catholic church has decided to move towards declaring as saints all the 273 people, including 11 Indians, killed in the 2019 Easter Sunday suicide bombings on its fifth anniversary. Cardinal Malcolm Ranjith, the Archbishop of Colombo, announced the move while addressing a mass on Sunday. "A person can be named a saint only after the completion of 5 years since one's sacrifice. Therefore, we will move towards declaring Easter Sunday victims as saints on April 21 this year," Ranjith said. On April 21, 2019, nine suicide bombers belonging to the local Islamist extremist group National Thawheed Jamaat linked to ISIS carried out a series of blasts that tore through three churches.*—PTI*

6 Chinese balloons flew through its airspace: Taiwan

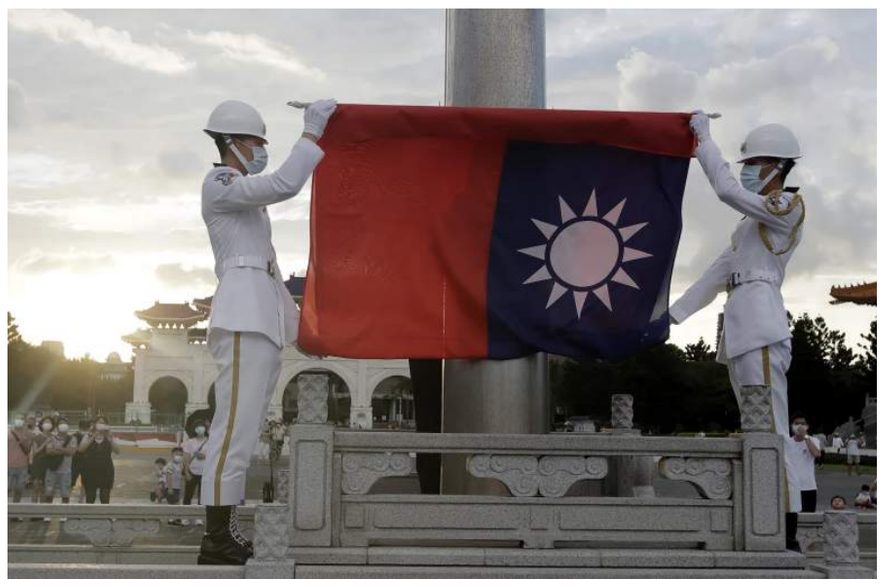
Taiwan also said that they detected warplanes and ships

TAIPEI, 22 JAN

Taiwan said on Monday that six Chinese balloons either flew over the island or through airspace just north of it, while Chinese warplanes and navy ships were also detected in the area.

The dispatch of such balloons, which generally disappear into the Pacific to the east, appears to be on the rise, though their purpose has not been publicly announced. The Defence Ministry noted the balloon sightings on a list of Chinese People's Liberation Army activity in the waters and airspace around Taiwan. One passed near the southern city of Pingtung, while the others flew just north of the port of Keelung, where Taiwan has an important naval base.

It remains unclear whether the balloons have an explicit military function, but they appear to be part of a campaign of harassment against the the self-governed island, which China claims as its own territory and has vowed to reclaim by force if necessary. In the US early last year, President Joe Biden vowed sharper rules to track, monitor and potentially shoot down unknown aerial objects after a three-week drama sparked by the discovery of a suspected Chinese spy balloon transiting much of the United States.



The Defence Ministry noted the balloon sightings on a list of Chinese People's Liberation Army activity in the waters and airspace around Taiwan *PHOTO: AP*

The US labelled the balloon a military craft and shot it down with a missile. It recovered what it said was sophisticated surveillance equipment. China responded angrily, saying it was only a weather balloon that had blown off course and called its downing a major overreaction.

Those are sometimes referred to as China's "gray area tactics" that cause consternation among its foes without sparking a direct confrontation. China has long blurred the lines between military and civilian functions, including in the South China Sea, where it operates a huge maritime militia ostensibly civilian fishing boats that act under government orders to assert Beijing's territorial claims. *—AP*

- The dispatch of such balloons, which generally disappear into the Pacific to the east, appears to be on the rise, though their purpose has not been publicly announced

Pak EC takes action against code of conduct violation

BALOCHISTAN, 22 JAN

The Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) Balochistan has expedited a crackdown against violations of the election code of conduct in Quetta, said spokesman of the provincial election commissioner, ARY News reported.

On the directives of Quetta's District Monitoring Officer, the election monitoring teams and the district administration took notice of the violations of the election code of conduct and removed the illegal election materials in a large-scale operation in Quetta City. As per the ECP's code of conduct for political parties and candidates, it is prohibited to put any kind of election materials on all government properties (buildings, poles, bridges etc.)

Similarly, panaflex, hoardings and billboards are also completely banned. The ECP spokesperson said that all the political parties and candidates are requested to show responsibility by fully adhering to the code of conduct issued by the ECP. The ECP warned: "Otherwise, action will be taken against the violators under the Election Act, 2017."

The monitoring teams of the ECP on Friday imposed a collective fine of Pakistani rupee (PKR) 85,000 on different candidates vying for the General Elections 2024 for 'violating' the election code in various constituencies of the country. According to ECP, a Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) candidate from PB-07 (Ziarat) Noor Muhammad has been fined PKR 40,000 as he was found violating the election code of conduct.

In Mardan, a fine of PKR 25,000 was imposed on Zulfiqar Khan contesting from PK-58 and PKR 10,000 on ANP's candidate Gohar Ali Shah from PK-54. PML-N's Jamshed Khan from PK-61 was fined for PKR 10,000.

—ANI

Netanyahu rejects Hamas deal to end war, release captives

PALESTINE, 22 JAN

Israel's Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has rejected a proposal by Hamas to end the war and release captives in exchange for withdrawing Israeli forces, releasing prisoners and accepting the armed group's governance of Gaza.

Netanyahu, who is under growing domestic pressure to bring the captives home, said that accepting Hamas's conditions would mean leaving the armed group "intact" and that Israel's soldiers had "fallen in vain".

"I reject outright the terms of surrender of the monsters of Hamas," Netanyahu said on Sunday. "If we accept this, we won't be able to guarantee the safety of our citizens. We will not be able to bring evacuees home safely and the next October 7 will only be a matter of time," the Israeli leader added.

Netanyahu *PHOTO: PTI*

Netanyahu earlier repeated his opposition to an independent Palestinian state, insisting he would not compromise on "full Israeli security control over the entire area in the west of Jordan". Netanyahu is under pressure on multiple fronts, as families of the captives call for a deal to secure the return of their loved ones, members of his far-right ruling coalition push for an escalation of the war, and growing differences cloud relations with the administration of United States President Joe Biden.

On Sunday evening, the Hostages and Missing Families Forum began a protest outside the Israeli leader's private home in Jerusalem, pledging not to leave until he agrees to a deal on the captives' release.

"If the prime minister decides to sacrifice the hostages, he should show leadership and honestly share his position with the Israeli public," the group said in a statement.

—Courtesy, Al Jazeera

At least dozens are still missing after a landslide struck China's southwestern province of Yunnan *PHOTO: X/ XINHUA NEWS*

At least 8 dead in Yunnan landslide

YUNNAN, 22 JAN

At least eight people have died and dozens are still missing after a landslide struck China's southwestern province of Yunnan.

The landslide in Zhaotong city happened at 05:51 local time (21:51 GMT) on Monday, trapping 47 people. President Xi Jinping has ordered an "all-out" rescue in the area which is experiencing sub-zero temperatures. The cause of the landslide remains unclear, but the remote, mountainous region is prone to them.

More than 500 people were evacuated from their homes and nearly 1,000 rescue workers were dispatched to the site. Chinese vice-premier Zhang Guoqing reportedly led a group to the site to guide rescue operations. One of the villagers told local media that most of the residents were either elderly or children.

Another resident told local news outlet Jimu News that the landslide happened while many people were still asleep on Monday morning.

"It was very loud, and there was also a shake, it felt like a big earthquake," she said. Video clips shared on social media showed rescuers walking on piles of rubble against a backdrop of snow-covered mountains. Personal belongings are seen scattered among the collapsed masonry. *—BBC News*

POLAND'S PM VISITS UKRAINE TO SHOW SUPPORT

KYIV, 22 JAN

Polish Prime Minister Donald Tusk arrived in Ukraine's capital on Monday for talks with President Volodymyr Zelenskyy on how Poland can keep supporting the country's almost two-year war with Russia and resolve a dispute between the neighbouring nations over grain shipments and trucking. Tusk, who returned to power in Poland last month and is keen to show that a change in government won't bring a change in Ukraine policy, was also due to meet with Ukrainian Prime Minister Denys Shmyhal. "There are some conflicts of interest, we know it well and we will talk about them, but not only in the spirit of friendship, which is obvious, but with the attitude to solve these problems as soon as possible, not to maintain or multiply them," Tusk said, according to comments posted on X, formerly Twitter, by his office. "For me, it is very important to build the feeling that Poland is the most reliable, most stable ally of Ukraine in this deadly clash with evil," Tusk said. His visit took place the day after Moscow-installed officials in eastern Ukraine reported that Ukrainian shelling killed at least 27 people on the outskirts of a Russian-occupied city. Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov called the shelling outside Donetsk a "monstrous terrorist act", and the Russia-backed local authorities declared a day of mourning. *—AP*

Storm Isha batters UK, Ireland leaves many without power

LONDON, 22 JAN

Thousands of people were without electricity and hundreds of trains were cancelled on Monday after the latest in a wave of winter storms lashed Britain and Ireland with heavy rain and wind gusts of almost 100 miles (160 kilometres) an hour.

The UK's Met Office weather service had issued an unusual blanket wind warning for the whole country before Storm Isha, which reached its peak overnight. A 99-mile-an-hour gust was recorded at Brizlee Wood radar station in northeastern England.

Ireland and the UK have been hammered since fall by a series of gusty and wet storms that have toppled trees, knocked out power and led to flooding along river valleys. Isha is the ninth named storm since September.

The railway operator for Scotland halted train service Sunday night and into Monday's rush hour. Network Rail, which owns the railway infrastructure in England, Scotland and Wales, said it was placing speed limits on most lines to prevent engines from running into fallen trees and other debris, and trains would be affected into the morning commute. Several major roads in Scotland and northern England were shut because of wind, fallen trees or overturned trucks. Chief Superintendent Davy Beck of the Police Service of Northern Ireland said many roads across that region remained impassable on Monday morning.

"There is also a continued risk of significant debris on the road network as wind speeds remain high throughout Monday," he said. Planes bound for several airports were diverted — including a flight from the Canary Islands to Dublin that ended up in Bordeaux, France. *—AP*

A tree branch fallen on a car on Lisburn Road in Belfast, Northern Ireland, during Storm Isha *PHOTO: PTI*

- Ireland and the UK have been hammered since fall by a series of gusty storms that have toppled trees, knocked out power and led to flooding along river valleys

US PRESIDENTIAL RACE

Florida Governor Ron DeSantis endorsed former US president Donald Trump as the party's nominee *PHOTO: PTI*

DeSantis quits race, endorses Trump for 2024

WASHINGTON, 22 JAN

Florida Governor Ron DeSantis announced that he is withdrawing from the Republican party's presidential primary race and endorsing former US president Donald Trump as the party's nominee.

Indian American former governor of South Carolina, Nikki Haley, 51, is the only Republican left in the race against Trump, 77, who is seeking to enter the White House for the second term. A White House occupant from January 2017 to January 2021, Trump lost to incumbent Joe Biden in the 2020 elections.

Trump, who is so far the most popular Republican Presidential candidate with a majority of the party members supporting him, as per all major polls, won the Iowa Caucus last week and is leading in the New Hampshire primaries, which is scheduled for 23 January. With the withdrawal by DeSantis, who once was seen as a formidable challenge to Trump, it's now a race of two in the Republican party between Trump and Haley. Political pundits now say that the former president is set to be the party's nominee, and the November 2024 presidential elections will be a repeat of the 2020 elections: Trump vs Biden.

"Following our second-place finish in Iowa, we've prayed and deliberated on our way forward. If there was anything I could do to produce a favourable outcome, more campaign stops, more interviews, I would do it.

But I can't ask our supporters to volunteer their time and donate their resources if we don't have a clear path to victory. Accordingly, I am today suspending my campaign," DeSantis said in a video message posted on X, a social media platform.

"It's clear to me that a majority of Republican primary voters want to give Donald Trump another chance. While I have had disagreements with Donald Trump, such as on the coronavirus pandemic and his elevation of Anthony Fauci, Trump is superior to the current incumbent, Joe Biden. That is clear," he said. *—PTI*

- Indian American former governor of South Carolina, Nikki Haley, 51, is the only Republican left in the race against Trump, 77, who is seeking to enter the White House for the second term

> **I can't ask our supporters to volunteer their time and donate their resources if we don't have a clear path to victory. Accordingly, I am today suspending my campaign**
>
> -Ron DeSantis, Florida Governor

UN REPORT

Afghanistan: Taliban deprive women of livelihoods

ISLAMABAD, 22 JAN

The Taliban are restricting Afghan women's access to work, travel and healthcare if they are unmarried or don't have a male guardian, according to a UN report published Monday.

In one incident, officials from the Vice and Virtue Ministry advised a woman to get married if she wanted to keep her job at a healthcare facility, saying it was inappropriate for an unwed woman to work.

The Taliban have barred women from most areas of public life and stopped girls from going to school beyond the sixth grade as part of harsh measures they imposed after taking power in 2021, despite initially promising more moderate rule. They have also shut down beauty parlours and started enforcing a dress code, arresting women who don't comply with their interpretation of hijab, or Islamic headscarf.

In May 2022, the Taliban issued a decree calling for women to only show their eyes and recommending they wear the head-to-toe burqa, similar to restrictions during the Taliban's previous rule between 1996 and 2001.

In its latest quarterly report, covering October to December last year, the UN mission in Afghanistan said the Taliban are cracking down on Afghan women who are single or don't have a male guardian, or mahram, accompanying them.

There are no official laws about male guardianship in Afghanistan, but the Taliban have said women cannot move around or travel a certain distance without a man who is related to her by blood or marriage.

Three female health care workers were detained last October because they were going to work without a mahram. They were released after their families signed a written guarantee that they would not repeat the act, the report said.

In Paktia province, the Vice and Virtue Ministry has stopped women without mahrams from accessing health facilities since December. It visits health facilities in the province to ensure compliance. *—AP*

According to the UN report the Taliban have barred women from most areas of public life *PHOTO: PTI*

Insurance brokerage Lockton enters Indian market

MUMBAI, 22 JAN

US-brd independent insurance brokerage Lockton on Monday announced its entry into the Indian market. With over 135 offices worldwide, Lockton's entry in the country is subject to regulatory approval. This will meet India's growing demand for risk consulting and management services, the company said in a statement. The statement further said Sandeep Dadia has been appointed as Chief Executive Officer, India, and a member of the Lockton Asia leadership team. Dadia aims to fully harness the company's global expertise and local knowledge, while maintaining its impressive 97 per cent client retention rate, it added. Lockton is the world's largest independent insurance brokerage. *—PTI*

Vikas Lifecare to acquire 60% stake in Dubai-based entity

NEW DELHI, 22 JAN

Homegrown entity Vikas Lifecare Ltd (VLL) on Monday said it will acquire 60 per cent stake in Dubai-based SKY 2.0 Club for USD 79 million (around Rs 650 crore). The acquisition process shall be completed in the ongoing financial year, Vikas Lifecare said in an exchange filing. "The acquisition is a share swap deal signed between Vikas Lifecare and the holding company Blue Sky Event Hall FZ-LLC, Dubai, for acquisition of 60 per cent stake in SKY 2.0 Club business and all future business ventures in the relevant business segment at an enterprise valuation of about USD 130 million," it said. The SKY 2.0 Club is the largest nightclub in the Middle East and Asia, according to the filing. On 18 January, Vikas Lifecare announced acquiring a 50 per cent stake in UAE-based Portfolio Managing Events LLC for Rs 100 crore. Vikas Lifecare recycles plastic waste to manufacture pallets and interlocking tiles for industrial applications. *—PTI*

Tamilnad Mercantile Bank reports ₹284cr net profit in Q3FY24

THOOTHUKUDI, 22 JAN

Private sector Tamilnad Mercantile Bank has reported a net profit of Rs 284 crore for the October-December 2023 quarter, the bank said on Monday. The Tuticorin-based bank had reported a net profit at Rs 280 crore during the corresponding quarter of the last financial year.The bank's total income during the quarter under review grew to Rs 1,387 crore from Rs 1,173 crore registered in the same period last year. The total business of the bank during the October-December 2023 quarter surged to Rs 85,185 crore from Rs 78,242 crore in the same period last year. In a BSE filing, the bank said it has been giving continued thrust on advances to priority sectors like agriculture, micro, small and medium enterprises, and housing constituting 75 per cent of the Adjusted Net Bank Credit (ANBC) which is above the regulatory requirement of 40 per cent. During the quarter ending on December 31, 2023, the bank said it had opened six branches and a new current account scheme 'TMB RERA Current Account' for builders and land developers. The bank also launched new loan products 'TMB Home Elite' and 'TMB Mini Lap' during the period, the statement added. *—PTI*

Sony terminates $10B Zee merger deal

Sony is also seeking $90 million for breach of conditions that the Indian firm has refuted

NEW DELHI, 22 JAN

Culver Max Entertainment, formerly known as Sony Pictures, on Monday terminated its proposed USD 10 billion merger agreement with Zee Entertainment. Meanwhile it also sought USD 90 million for breach of conditions besides initiating arbitration, charges that the Indian firm has refuted.

In a statement, Sony Group Corporation (SGC) said Zee Entertainment Enterprises Ltd (ZEEL) did not satisfy the merger conditions despite engaging in discussions to extend the end date for consummation of the transaction.

On 22 December, 2021, Sony Pictures Networks India (SPNI) and ZEEL had entered into a definitive agreement to merge, with a two-year deadline.

However, last December, the deadline was extended for a month as per the provisions of the agreement, after both companies failed to resolve their difference.

The one-month extension ended on January 20, 2024 but both parties could not resolve their differences. The time frame was also not extended further.

The agreement provided that if the parties were unable to agree upon such an extension by the end of the discussion period, any party could terminate the agreement by providing a written notice.

"SPNI, a wholly-owned subsidiary of Sony Group Corporation today issued a notice terminating the definitive agreements entered into by SPNI and ZEEL relating to the merger of ZEEL with and into SPNI," said a statement by the Japanese multinational.

Sony said the merger did not close by the end date as, among other things, and the closing conditions to the merger were not satisfied by the specified time.

"As a result, on 22 January, 2024, SPNI issued a notice to ZEEL terminating the definitive agreements," it said.

Sony said the merger did not close by the end date as, among other things, and the closing conditions to the merger were not satisfied by the specified time **PHOTO: PTI**

Meanwhile, in a separate statement, Sony said, "Although we engaged in good faith discussions to extend the end date under the merger cooperation agreement (MCA), we were unable to agree upon an extension by the 21 January deadline."

Reacting to Sony's move, ZEEL said it is evaluating all the available options which also include "taking appropriate legal action and contesting Culver Max and BEPL's claims in the arbitration proceedings".

"The company categorically refutes all claims and assertions made by Culver Max and BEPL regarding alleged breaches of the MCA by ZEEL, including their claims for the termination fee, and reserves all its rights in this matter," ZEEL said in a regulatory filing.

Culver Max is an indirect wholly-owned subsidiary of SGC. Bangla Entertainment Pvt Ltd (BEPL) is also an indirect wholly-owned subsidiary of SGC and a part of the SGC Group.

ZEEL said it has received a demand of termination fee of USD 90 million (around Rs 748 crore) on account of "alleged breaches" and invoking arbitration. It denied all assertions raised by Culver Max and BEPL on the alleged breaches under the terms of the MCA, including their claims for the termination fee.

"ZEEL's Board of Directors is evaluating all the available options. Basis the guidance received from the Board, ZEEL will take all the necessary steps to protect the long-term interests of all its stakeholders, including by taking appropriate legal action and contesting Culver Max and BEPL's claims in the arbitration proceedings.

It further said ZEEL MD and CEO Punit Goenka had agreed to step down as the leader of the proposed merged entity and sought a six-month extension.

This was done in the interest of the merger and proposals in this regard were discussed, including for appointment of a director on the board of the merged company, protection for conduct of pending investigations and legal proceedings in the best interest of ZEEL's directors and shareholders and the consequent modifications to the scheme to incorporate the same. "ZEEL proposed an extension of a maximum period of six months for consummation of the transaction, however, Culver Max did not provide any counter proposal for extension. These discussions did not result in any proposal from Sony but they rather have chosen to terminate," it said.

It has displayed "utmost commitment" towards the merger by undertaking several permanent and irreversible steps, resulting in one time and recurring costs for the company, said ZEEL. *—PTI*

'Govt must not cut taxes on smartphone parts'

NEW DELHI, 22 JAN

The government should not cut import duties on electronic components used in making smartphones in the forthcoming Budget as the current tariff structure is successful, and changing them could harm local manufacturing, a GTRI report said on Monday.

The Global Trade Research Initiative (GTRI) said that maintaining the current rates would help balance industry growth and long-term development in India's growing smartphone market.

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"Currently, tariffs on imported parts for smartphones in India are between 7.5 per cent and 10 per cent. The Budget should maintain these taxes," it said, adding that the current rate of levies supports duty-free imports for making products to exports.

(GTRI) said that maintaining the current rates would help balance industry growth **PHOTO: PTI**

The Budget is scheduled to be presented on 1 February.

The suggestion is in contrast to the demand of industry body India Cellular and Electronics Association (ICEA) that import duty cuts on mobile phone components can increase domestic production of handsets by 28 per cent to $ 82 billion, boost exports, and support indigenous manufacturing.

The think tank said that Indian manufacturers "must pay" duties on smartphones sold within India, but exports should be exempted from such duties.

"Firms can import necessary inputs or capital goods duty-free for manufacturing and exporting electronic items. This is facilitated through schemes like Advance Authorisation, Export Promotion Capital Goods, and operating in Special Economic Zones (SEZs) or 100 per cent Export Oriented Units. Additionally, firms can use the customs bond scheme for duty-free imports without localisation requirements," GTRI Co-Founder Ajay Srivastava said.

The GTRI report also said that India's smartphone industry, with exports booming from $ 7.2 billion in 2022 to $ 13.9 billion in 2023, becomes the top performer for the PLI (production linked incentive) scheme by a wide margin and over 98 per cent of smartphones sold in India are made locally.

This shows the success of deft policy interventions that include the PLI incentives that allow 4-6 per cent cash incentive on annual incremental production and retaining a difference in tariffs of smartphones and its components.

"Big players like Apple, using facilities in SEZs, benefit greatly from this, exporting large volumes without paying import duties on components. Apple collaborates with contract manufacturers Foxconn and Wistron to make smartphones in India. Both Foxconn and Wistron are located in SEZs in India," he said.

Srivastava added that removing tariffs might lead to a rise in superficial assembly plants that rely on imported parts and contribute little to the local economy.

"Such setups would likely vanish once government incentives end, harming deeper, more sustainable manufacturing efforts in India.

Imported components and subassemblies account for bill of material value of an India-made smartphone up to 90 per cent," he added. *—PTI*

India's WTO Bound rate is 40 per cent on these products **PHOTO: PIXABAY**

Hike import duty on paper, boards to 25% in budget: IPMA

CHENNAI, 22 JAN

- The association has also asked for the issuance of quality control orders (QCOs) for different grades of paper

Domestic paper and paperboard manufacturers have demanded a hike in import duty to 25 per cent on paper products and the imposition of a quality control order in the upcoming Budget to discourage cheap inward shipments.

The Indian Paper Manufacturers Association (IPMA), in a statement on Monday, said that in its pre-budget submissions to the government, it has urged for increasing the basic customs duty on the import of paper and paperboard from 10 per cent to 25 per cent as India's WTO Bound rate is 40 per cent on these products.

The association has also asked for the issuance of quality control orders (QCOs) for different grades of paper to ensure the supply of quality products to Indian consumers and check the import of sub-standard products into the country.

IPMA President Pawan Agarwal urged the government to keep paper and paperboard on the negative list while reviewing the existing FTAs (ASEAN, South Korea and Japan) and formulating new ones. He mentioned that any increase in customs duty will not impact the duty-free imports coming into the country under the FTAs. The association noted that the paper industry has been reeling under stress with the underutilisation of capacity in view of the indiscriminate increase in the import of paper and paperboard.

"What is hurting all the more is the fact that the imports of paper India have been increasing in spite of adequate domestic production capacity straddling all paper," according to IPMA. *—PTI*

KHULBE IS JINDAL STAINLESS NEW CEO

NEW DELHI, 22 JAN

Jindal Stainless Ltd on Monday said it has elevated Whole Time Director Tarun Khulbe as Chief Executive Officer (CEO).

A decision in this regard was taken at the company's board meeting last week, Jindal Stainless Ltd (JSL) said in a regulatory filing.

He has been serving as the Whole Time Director of the company since May 2018.

He will continue to hold the post besides that of the CEO, the company said.

Khulbe has around 35 years of industry experience in business development, supply chain management, people practices and IT enablement. Khulbe joined JSL as a general manager for the cold rolling mills at Hisar, Haryana, in October 2004.

Tarun Khulbe **PHOTO: X**

Part of OP Jindal Group, Jindal Stainless is India's largest stainless steel manufacturer. *—PTI*

EVs must to make India a developed nation: DPIIT secy

NEW DELHI, 22 JAN

The vision to make India a developed nation by 2047 includes a major shift towards electric vehicles.

This has to be supported by tax incentives, production linked incentive schemes, and the mandatory provision of charging infrastructure, a top government official said on Monday.

Secretary in the Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade (DPIIT) Rajesh Kumar Singh said that the development and adoption of Electric Vehicles (EVs) play a pivotal role in India's transition to a low-carbon economy.

"The comprehensive vision for 2047 includes a substantial shift towards electric vehicles across various segments, supported by tax incentives, Production Linked Incentive (PLI) schemes, and the mandatory provision of charging infrastructure," Singh told PTI.

He said that a shift in the modal share of freight from road to rail will be an effective lever to decarbonise the freight transport sector.

He added that the government's authorisation of 100 per cent Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) for renewable power projects underscores the nation's dedication to sustainable development. The vision encompasses various aspects of development, including economic growth, social progress, environmental sustainability, and good governance.

Singh said that he discussed these things in a session in World Economic Forum (WEF) meet at Davos. *—PTI*

A BOOST FOR CITY

Ayodhya will be the biggest tourist hub

AYODHYA, 22 JAN

The grand opening of the Ram temple in Ayodhya may help the town attract at least 50 million tourist a year.

This will be higher than religious tourism hotspots of Golden Temple and Tirupati Temple as massive spend on infrastructure such as airports will put the once out-of-the-way town in Uttar Pradesh on the tourism circuit.

Brokerage Jefferies in a report estimates that a USD 10 billion makeover of Ayodhya with a new airport, revamped railway station, township and improved road connectivity will likely drive a multiplier effect with new hotels and other economic activities. It "could attract 50 million+ tourists a year".

Golden Temple in Amritsar gets an estimated 30-35 million footfalls a year while Tirupati temple sees 25-30 million visits. Globally, Vatican city gets around 9 million tourists every year and Mecca in Saudi Arabia around 20 million.

"Religious tourism is still the biggest segment of tourism in India," said Jeferies. "Several popular religious centres attract annual tourist traffic of 10-30 million despite the existing infrastructural bottlenecks. And hence, the creation of a new religious tourist centre (Ayodhya) with improved connectivity and infrastructure can create a meaningfully large economic impact." Tourism contributed USD 194 billion to FY19 (pre-Covid) GDP and is expected to grow at an 8 per cent CAGR to USD 443 billion by FY33, it said, adding tourism to GDP ratio in India at 6.8 per cent of GDP is below most of the large emerging/developed economies; which are higher by 3-5 percentage points.

Phase 1 of a new airport at Ayodhya has become operational and can handle 1 million passengers **PHOTO: PTI**

Stating that Ayodhya could be a template for India's tourism boost, it said Rs 85,000 crore (USD 10 billion) makeover is set to transform the ancient city from a sleepy town to a global religious and spiritual tourist hotspot. "Tourism is projected to surge and increase economic and religious migration to Ayodhya, multiple sectors stand to benefit, including hotels, airlines, hospitality, FMCG, travel ancillaries, cement etc," the brokerage said.

Phase 1 of a new airport at Ayodhya has become operational and can handle 1 million passengers. Additional domestic capacity and an international terminal is expected by 2025 with a capacity to handle 6 million passengers. Railway station has been upgraded to double the capacity to 60,000 passengers per day. A 1,200-acre greenfield township is being planned and road connectivity is being beefed up as well.

At present Ayodhya has around 17 hotels with 590 rooms. 73 new hotels are in the pipeline, of which 40 are already under construction. While Indian Hotels, Marriott and Wyndham have already signed deals for hotels, ITC is exploring opportunities in Ayodhya. Oyo plans to add 1,000 hotel rooms in Ayodhya.

Jefferies said India offers geographical variety, diversity, culture, heritage sites and a treasure trove of art, music and cuisines to make it a popular global tourist destination. And the temple at Ayodhya will only help unlock tourism potential of India, which has distinct advantages -- ranked 7th most beautiful country by Forbes in 2022, home for 42 Unesco World Heritage sites, one of only three countries in the world to have both hot and cold deserts and ranked 10th in the Medical Tourism Index. *—PTI*

Tax buoyancy to give headroom for higher social sector budget

NEW DELHI, 22 JAN

The increased tax buoyancy as reflected in both income tax and GST monthly collection data will provide headroom to the government to allocate more funds for farmers and social sector schemes in the forthcoming interim budget, without sacrificing fiscal prudence, sources said.

The focus in the interim budget, which will be the last major economic document of the Modi 2.0 Government ahead of the general elections, is likely to be on the issues being faced by poorer sections of the society, especially in rural areas.

According to sources, collections from income and corporate taxes have been showing buoyancy in the current fiscal, and the total direct tax mop-up is likely to exceed budget estimates by about Rs 1 lakh crore.

The government had budgeted to collect Rs 18.23 lakh crore from direct taxes in this fiscal. Till 10 January, the mop-up stood at Rs 14.70 lakh crore, which is 81 per cent of budget estimates.

PHOTO: PIXABAY

On the Goods and Services Tax (GST) front, Central GST revenues are expected to exceed budget estimates of Rs 8.1 lakh crore by about Rs 10,000 crore. According to estimates, there will be a shortfall of around Rs 49,000 crore in excise and customs duties collections in this fiscal year.

The Centre's gross tax revenues are expected to exceed the Budget estimates of Rs 33.6 lakh crore by Rs 60,000 crore.

ICRA in its interim budget expectations report had said that it expects gross tax revenues to grow 11 per cent in the next fiscal (2024-25), led by direct taxes and GST collections, even as the growth in excise collections is likely to be subdued. *—PTI*

TUTICORIN ALKALI CHEMICALS RESUME OPS AT TN PLANT

THOOTHUKUDI, 22 JAN

Tuticorin Alkali Chemicals and Fertilizers Ltd has resumed operations at its factory in Tamil Nadu which was suspended due to devastating rainfall in December 2023.

The company, engaged in production of soda ash, ammonium chloride fertiliser, had to shutdown the operations at the plant in Tuticorin due to the unprecedented heavy rainfall received in southern parts of the country in December 2023.

The Tuticorin unit established in 1981, is the only producer of Soda Ash in the South India. The company has adopted an eco-friendly dual process and co-produces Ammonium Chloride fertiliser at the factory.

Unprecedented rains battered Kanyakumari, Tuticorin, Tirunelveli, and Tenkasi districts causing huge devastation to the region which claimed several lives and threw normal life out of gear. *—PTI*

PBL likely to be back in new avatar by end of this year

NEW DELHI, 22 JAN

Dormant for the past three years following the disruption caused by the Covid-19 pandemic, the Premier Badminton League could see a revival by the end of this year or early 2025, the national federation's secretary Sanjay Mishra has revealed to PTI. Mishra said efforts are on by the Badminton Association of India (BAI) to resolve "some internal issues" which were coming in the way of bringing the event back on the calendar."Badminton league is important for our players. Unfortunately, it hasn't been conducted since the 2020 pandemic. There were also some internal issues but those would be solved soon," Mishra said, without any further. *—PTI*

Pak men's hockey team fails to qualify for Olympics

KARACHI, 22 JAN

Pakistan's embattled men's hockey team has failed to qualify for the Olympic Games for a third consecutive time after losing its final shot at a Paris ticket in the FIH Qualifiers in Oman, a result that left the game's former greats here sad and outraged in equal measure.After losing 0-4 to Germany in the tournament's semi-final, Pakistan went down 2-3 to New Zealand in the third-place match last night, ending their chances of making it to this year's Paris Olympics as only the top-three made the cut. Pakistan's last Olympic appearance was in the 2012 Games where the team signed off 7th, a marginal improvement from its worst ever 8th place finish in the Beijing Games. *—PTI*

PHOTO: X

Congo skipper Mbemba faces online racism

ABIDJAN, 22 JAN

Congo Captain Chancel Mbemba was subjected to a torrent of racist abuse on social media after leading his team to a 1-1 draw against Morocco at the Africa Cup of Nations. Mbemba's Instagram account was targeted by many users who replied to his latest posts with monkey or gorilla emojis, or wrote racist comments.The 29-year-old Mbemba, who is Black, plays for top-tier French club Marseille. Mbemba had a heated exchange with Morocco coach Walid Regragui after the match. It led to a melee between players and officials from both teams that continued as they left the field and went down the players' tunnel. Regragui sought Mbemba after the game when the player was on his knees giving thanks in a personal moment. *—AP*

Bayern loses 1-0 to Werder Bremen to slip off the pace

MUNICH, 22 JAN

Bayern Munich coach Thomas Tuchel was left questioning his team's attitude after a 1-0 loss at home to Werder Bremen dented its chances of catching Bundesliga leader Bayer Leverkusen. Former Bayern player Mitchell Weiser scored the only goal as Bremen earned its first win over Bayern since 2008 to leave the defending champions seven points off Leverkusen. Speaking to broadcaster DAZN, Tuchel accused his team of playing for most of the game "as if we had a 10-point lead and a Champions League game coming up on Tuesday," pointed criticism of a team which has won the German league 11 years running. Tuchel reeled off a list of problems with Bayern's game, from a lack of movement to allowing a "crazy" number of counterattacks, and suggested his team had only realised the seriousness of the situation in the last 20 minutes. "A deserved loss because 20 minutes just aren't enough," he said. *—AP*

Aus Open: Alcaraz sets up quarterfinal against Zverev

Alcaraz beat Kecmanovic 6-4, 6-4, 6-0 in less than 2 hours

MELBOURNE, 22 JAN

Carlos Alcaraz completed a Grand Slam set by reaching the Australian Open quarterfinals for the first time. Alcaraz, the 20-year-old Wimbledon champion, missed the season-opening major in 2023 because of injury. But he's more than making up for lost time.

The No 2-seeded Alcaraz beat Miomir Kecmanovic 6-4, 6-4, 6-0 in less than two hours Monday to open the night session on Rod Laver Arena.

Zverev vs Alcaraz

He has dropped just one set en route to the last eight. Zverev is there for the third time but is coming off some long five-set wins, including a four-hour, 7-5, 3-6, 6-3, 4-6, 7-6 (3) fourth-round victory over No 19 Cameron Norrie.

It was the 32nd five-set match so far at Melbourne Park, a tournament record in the Open era. The Olympic champion Alexander Zverev has to face world number two Alcaraz tomorrow.

Medvedev vs Hurkacz

No 3 Daniil Medvedev, a two-time Australian Open runner-up, beat No 69-ranked Nuno Borges 6-3, 7-6 (4), 5-7, 6-1 and will next face No 9 Hubert Hurkacz, who ended the run of French wild-card entry Arthur Cazaux 7-6 (6), 7-6 (3), 6-4.

Medvedev had two match points at 5-4 in the third set but Borges forced a fourth, only to fade as the Russian pulled away for victory. *—AP*

Aryna Sabalenka, Anna Kalinskaya, Carlos Alcaraz and Daniel Medvedev **PHOTO: X/ AUS OPEN**

- Medvedev had two match points at 5-4 in the third set but Borges forced a fourth, only to fade as the Russian pulled away for victory

face world number two Alcaraz tomorrow.

Yastremska vs Noskova- a fight to watch out for

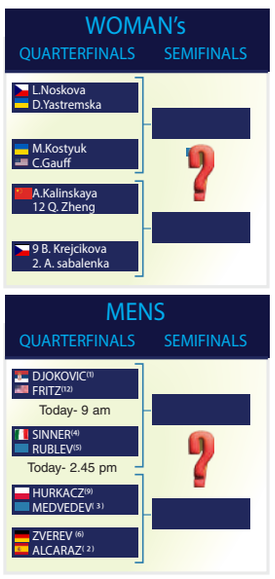
While the highly-ranked players continue to advance in the men's draw, the seeded players keep toppling out on the women's side. And that has opened opportunities for Dayana Yastremska and Linda Noskova to advance to the quarterfinals of a Grand Slam for the first time. Yastremska beat the 18th-seeded Victoria Azarenka 7-6 (6), 6-4, a two-time Australian Open champion, and No 23-seeded Elina Svitolina had to retire after hurting her back when she was trailing Noskova 3-0. *—AP*

Zheng vs Kalinskaya

All four quarterfinalists from the top half of the women's draw are also into the last eight at Melbourne Park for the first time, with No 12-seeded Zheng Qinwen the highest-ranked player in the group. Zheng matched her career-best run — she reached the US Open quarterfinals last year — by breezing to a 6-0, 6-3 win against Oceane Dodin. She'll next play Kalinskaya, who beat No 26 Jasmine Paolini 6-4, 6-2.

Match paused

The match on Margaret Court Arena between Zverev vs Alcaraz was prolonged after being delayed briefly when a protester threw anti-war pamphlets onto the back of the court in the third set *—AP*



Bopanna-Ebden enter QF

MELBOURNE, 22 JAN

India's Rohan Bopanna and his Australian partner Matthew Ebden entered the men's doubles quarterfinals of the Australian Open with an impressive 7-6 7-6 victory over Wesley Koolhof of the Netherlands and Croatia's Nikola Mektic here on Monday.

The 43-year-old Bopanna and Ebden, who are seeded second in the draw, were broken early in both sets but showed themselves to be up to the task with some great returns against the 14th seeds.

The Indo-Australian pair will next meet the sixth-seeded Argentine duo of Maximo Gonzalez and Andres Molteni.

Rohan Bopanna and Matthew Ebden **PHOTO: X/ BOPANNA**

They are also the highest seeded pair to remain alive in the men's doubles competition and Monday's win was a praiseworthy one against the former top ranked doubles pair in the world. Bopanna's service let him down initially as he was broken in the second game of the first set with the 14th seeds racing to a 3-0 lead within first 15 minutes of the start.

However, the veteran Indian, who recently retired from Davis Cup duties, was back in his groove with some signature backhand down the lines and deft overhead lobs which were placed inches inside the baseline. *—PTI*

Chairman of selectors Inzamam ul Haq squarely blamed Pakistan Cricket Board during the press conference **PHOTO: X/PCB**

Inzaman blames outgoing boss for losing in WC

KARACHI, 22 JAN

A furious former skipper and chairman of selectors Inzamam ul Haq squarely blamed Pakistan Cricket Board's outgoing top boss Zaka Ashraf for being responsible for country's disastrous ODI World Cup performance in India last year.

Zaka, who was named head of an Interim Management Committee to run PCB affairs in July, announced at a meeting of the committee a few days back that he was resigning immediately as Chairman and as a member of the board. Inzamam, was in fact, removed after the end of the tournament on allegations of 'Conflict of Interest' that he is managed by the same UK-based management firm that also looks after business interests of some of the active players. "Can you imagine the mindset of the players when during an important event like the World Cup in India they hear that the PCB Chairman is saying the team selected was not done by the board but by the captain and chief selector only," Inzamam said on a Pakistani television channel.

Inzamam was referring to a press release issued by PCB at Zaka's behest after Pakistan lost few games in World Cup, completely disowning any responsibility about the selected team along with hints that skipper Babar Azam will be sacked after the tournament. "Just think what must be going through the players mind when they hear that an inquiry committee has been formed against the chief selector and he has resigned," he said. "Where does this happen?," the normally cool Inzamam thundered.

- Zaka formed an inquiry committee to look into Conflict of Interest allegations against the former skipper

Zaka formed an inquiry committee to look into Conflict of Interest allegations against the former skipper.

"I am still waiting for that report of the inquiry committee against me which was formed to probe whether I had committed a conflict of interest while being the chief selector," he said sarcastically.

Inzamam said everyone had a clear idea of how the PCB management was under Zaka. Inzamam also felt that the PCB and Pakistan cricket shouldn't be run on an ad-hoc basis anymore. *—PTI*

KOHLI WITHDRAWS FROM FIRST 2 TESTS AGAINST ENG

NEW DELHI, 22 JAN

India's batting mainstay Virat Kohli has pulled out of the first two Tests against England due to personal reasons, the BCCI said on Monday.The BCCI urged the fans and media to refrain from speculating about the reason for his forced break.

Kohli has requested the Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) to be withdrawn from the first two Tests of the upcoming IDFC First Bank Test series against England, citing personal reasons," BCCI secretary Jay Shah said in a statement. BCCI also said that Kohli had discussed with skipper Rohit Sharma and team management about his decision to pull-out."Virat has spoken to captain Rohit Sharma, the team management and the selectors and has emphasized that while representing the country has always been his top priority, certain personal situations demand his presence and undivided attention," the release stated. *—PTI*

Virat Kohli **PHOTO: PTI**

CA probes Maxwell's hospitalisation

MELBOURNE, 22 JAN

Cricket Australia (CA) has launched an investigation into an incident involving flamboyant all-rounder Glenn Maxwell, who had to be rushed to a hospital following a late-night party in Adelaide last week.

According to Daily Telegraph, Maxwell was out drinking and watching a concert by 'Six and Out', the band featuring former Australian fast bowler Brett Lee, when he felt unwell.

CA said it is aware of the incident involving the all-rounder who played a key role in Australia's triumphant World Cup campaign in India last October-November.

"Cricket Australia is aware of an incident involving Glenn Maxwell in Adelaide at the weekend and is seeking further information," a statement by CA said, according to 'ESPNcricinfo'.

Maxwell, who last week stepped down as captain of BBL side Melbourne Stars after failing to make the finals, was not named in the 13-man squad to face the West Indies in a three-match ODI series from 2 and 6 February. *—PTI*

GOLD MEDAL

Defending champions Maharashtra opened their gold medal account at the Khelo India Youth Games 2023 on Monday when gymnast Aaryan Davande clinched the artistic all-round crown at the SDAT Aquatics complex in Chennai on Monday **PHOTO: ANI**

Australia announce ODI squad to face WI, drop off Richardson

NEW DELHI, 22 JAN

Australia on Monday announced the 13-member ODI squad to face West Indies with Glenn Maxwell rested and Jhye Richardson ruled out due to an injury.

However, youngster batter Jake Fraser-McGurk and uncapped speedster Xavier Bartlett have been called up to Australia's ODI squad.

Fraser-McGurk is widely regarded as one of the most talented batters in Australia. The 21-year-old hit a world-record 29-ball century in the Marsh Cup earlier this season in Australia and was called in for Maxwell.

In the ongoing Big Bash League (BBL), Fraser-McGurk is playing for Melbourne Renegades, where he smashed a maiden first-class century and scored 257 runs with a strike rate of 158.64. Matt Short is likely to get a chance to open for the Aussies. Meanwhile, Lance Morris is set to make his international debut for the Aussies.

ODI SQUAD

Steven Smith (C), Sean Abbott, Xavier Bartlett, Nathan Ellis, Cameron Green, Aaron Hardie, Travis Head, Josh Inglis, Marnus Labuschagne, Jake Fraser-McGurk, Lance Morris, Matt Short, Adam Zampa. *—ANI*

Asian Cup: India look for win against Syria

AL KHOR, 22 JAN

Winless, and pointless, after losing two group matches, India need nothing more than a win against a tricky Syria to keep alive their faint hopes of making the knockout stage of AFC Asian Cup football tournament here on Tuesday.

A 0-2 and 0-3 defeat to Australia and Uzbekistan laid bare India's inability to give strong competition to the top teams of the continent but a win against Syria can salvage some pride for the Sunil Chhetri-led side.

Syria are currently ranked 91st in the FIFA chart, 11 places above India but a victory is not impossible for the Igor Stimac-coached side as they had won in the past -- in 2007, 2009 and 2012 Nehru Cup tournaments. The last time the two sides met, the match ended in a 1-1 draw in the 2019 Intercontinental Cup, and Stimac was also in charge of the Indian team then. India will finish third in Group B if they beat Syria but even that will not guarantee them a place in the round of 16. With a goal difference of minus five -- the deciding factor if teams are tied on points -- after two matches, it may be difficult for India to be one of the four third-placed teams to progress to the knockout stage. *—PTI*

SATWIK-CHIRAG PULLS OUT

Prannoy to lead Indian charge

JAKARTA, 22 JAN

Singles ace HS Prannoy will spearhead the Indian challenge at the Indonesian Masters Super 500 badminton tournament beginning here on Tuesday after the pull-out of crack doubles pair of Satwiksairaj Rankireddy and Chirag Shetty.

Having finished runners-up in back-to-back tournaments of Malaysia Super 1000 and India Open Super 750, the reigning Asian Games champions have given the tournament a miss with an eye on their workload with a gruelling season ahead of them. The duo's absence may have taken some sheen of the tournament, but world No 9 Prannoy will look to keep the Indian flag high continuing his consistent run.

Prannoy is only seeded Indian player at No 7 in the men's singles draw of 32 as he will begin his campaign against Loh Kean Yew of Singapore, against whom the Indian has a 4-1 win-loss record.

The world No 11 Yew's solitary win against Prannoy was at the 2021 World Championships and since then the Indian has won twice in a row with the last coming in bronze-medal winning run at the last year's World Championship.

Besides the that coveted bronze medal, Prannoy won the Malaysia Masters and finished second in the Australian Open last year. He has been at his consistent best and had a last-four after being ousted by eventual champion Yu Qi Shi of China in the Indian Open last week.

Before that, Prannoy made an opening round exit in the Malaysia Open Super 1000. The other Indian, who will be in focus will be world No 19 Lakshya Sen, looking to end his opening round jinx, when he is up against Weng Hong Yang of China.

The world No. 16 Chinese has a 3-2 win-loss ratio against the young Indian and goes into the match on the back of his Malaysia Open win less than two weeks back. *—PTI*

Prannoy is only seeded Indian player he will begin his campaign against Loh Kean Yew of Singapore **PHOTO: PTI**

Samad steers J&K to first win of Ranji

CUTTACK, 22 JAN

Abdul Samad helped Jammu & Kashmir overcome a tricky chase with an unbeaten 66, steering his team to a two-wicket win over Odisha in Ranji Trophy here on Monday.

It was the first win of the season for J&K after sharing points with Delhi and Himachal in their two home games marred by bad light in Elite Group D.

Resuming at 72 for four, J&K needed another 77 runs for the win and they somehow managed to cross the line. IPL regular Samad stood like a rock as wickets kept falling at the other end. His knock comprised seven fours and two sixes.

Samad remained unbeaten alongside India pacer Umran Malik when the winning runs were scored. J&K had taken the first innings lead by making 180 in response to Odisha's 130 on the opening day. Brief scores: Odisha 130 and 198 vs Jammu & Kashmir 180 and 149/8 in 23.2 overs. *—PTI*

Abdul Samad **PHOTO: BCCI**